NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 553 NEW YORK, AUGUST 3, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

A MYSTERY FROM THE KLONDIKE

—OR— NICK CARTER'S DOUBLE HEADED CASE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

It was a startling scene. Nick could see that Buck Hankins winced a little when another spot of blood appeared suddenly at the top of his left ear.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 553. NEW YORK, August 3, 1907. Price Five Cents.

A MYSTERY FROM THE KLONDIKE

OR,

Nick Carter's Double-headed Case.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A DOUBLE-HEADED CASE.

A messenger-boy stood facing Nick Carter while the detective read a letter that had just been given to him. It was as follows:

"My Dear Mr. Carter: My name, when you have finished this letter, will be unknown to you, although it is possible that you may have seen some mention of it in one of the daily papers. I have been in the city only a short time—two months, to be exact—but already I am surrounded by circumstances which render it necessary that I should call upon your services if you can be prevailed upon to assist me. I belong in the West. Four years ago I went to the Klondike, where I was successful; so much so that I have returned with a fortune. I have purchased the house of the late Malcolm Gunnison, with all that it contained, and I supposed that I had settled myself down to the enjoyment of a quiet life.

"It seems, however, that I am not at once to enjoy that peace which I believe I have earned by the years of hardship I have endured in the North. There is evidently a determined conspiracy against me—I might almost call it a left-over conspiracy, since I have no doubt that the men behind it are old enemies of mine from the mines.

"However, things have attained that point where I deem it best to call upon you to come to my aid, if you will do so, and to that end I will ask you to do me the honor to dine with me at my home this evening at eight o'clock, when we will have an opportunity to discuss matters quite thoroughly.

"Very truly yours,

"Godfrey Chester."

The address was of course at the top of the letter, and Nick remembered it as the palatial residence which Malcolm Gunnison had erected and furnished, only to die just as he had it ready to occupy.

The detective raised his eyes to the messenger.

"You are to return with an answer?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the lad.

"Tell the gentleman that I told you to say 'Yes'; that will be sufficient."

When the boy had gone, Nick read the letter through a second time and then tossed it on the table in front of him; and just as he did so, Chick, his first assistant, entered the room.

Nick pointed toward the letter on the table, and by a nod indicated that Chick was to read it; and when he had done so, the detective said:

"I have accepted the invitation to dine with the writer of that letter to-night, Chick, but I think I will send you in my place. In fact, I accepted the invitation for you."

"Do you mean that you wish me to represent you? To make up like you, and to make this man believe that I am you?" asked Chick.

"Yes."

"I suppose you have some good reason for that, haven't you? Or is it simply that you do not care to take the case yourself?" asked the assistant.

The detective was silent a moment before he replied; then he said:

"You know, Chick, it is rarely that I keep anything from you, don't you?"

"Certainly."

"Well, this is a matter where I think it is best for all concerned to turn over this case to you, just as it is, without any discussion between us. I will give you some instructions up to a certain point, and I wish you to follow them just as far as I give them, and no further. After that, you are to act in the matter precisely as if I were out of the country, and the case was entirely under your immediate supervision. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, your instructions are as follows: You are to make yourself up to represent me. You will put that letter in your pocket, and to-night at eight o'clock or a little before, you will call upon Godfrey Chester at his house, introduce yourself as Nick Carter, dine with him, and hear what he has to say. When you have heard him, you are to decide, without consulting me at all, whether you will take the case or not. If you decide to take it, you are to go ahead with it precisely as if I were not here at all, and you are not to mention it or anything that is connected with it, to me, unless I ask you to do so. Is that clear?"

"It seems to be mighty clear—yes. But I don't see——"

"Nor do I wish you to see—for the present. The point of the thing is that for the present we have got to divide our forces. I have another case on hand which will take my undivided attention."

"Oh, I see. And I suppose you don't care to tell me anything about that, either, eh?"

"No."

Chick raised the letter and read it through to the end a second time.

"I have heard about this Godfrey Chester," he said then.

"Yes?" replied the detective.

"Isn't he the chap whom the newspapers called the 'Klondike King,' when he came to town?"

"I believe he is, Chick."

"Said to be almost as rich as Rockefeller, isn't he?"

"I think it has been stated several times that he is even richer than the Standard Oil king. But those statements were of course only newspaper reports."

"Let me think," said the assistant. "I wonder if I can recall all that I have heard about him. He was an Arizonian originally. Then he went to the Klondike, where ultimately he found it rich and woke up one morning to discover that he was worth millions. And now he has made a sort of trust of his properties—if that word can be used in reference to gold-mines—and has come to New York to enjoy the fortune he has made."

The detective nodded. "That is about the idea," he said.

"He is still a young man, comparatively, as I understand it," continued Chick, "and—that is about all, I think."

"Yes; that is about all that is known."

"It's funny that you don't want the case yourself, Nick."

The detective smiled.

"I have just told you that I have another case on hand," he said.

"It is only fair that you should tell me if your other case has anything to do with this one?" said the assistant. "The very fact that you will say nothing to me about either one leads me naturally to suppose that the two are in some way related. Is that true?"

"How persistent you are, Chick!"

"Won't you answer me?"

"The fact of the matter is that I cannot answer you—just yet," replied the detective slowly. "I will say this: Another case has come in here to me, and I have reason to think that the two affairs may touch before we have carried them very far. I don't know anything about that case in your hands, save what the letter contains, and that is nothing at all. I do not want to know any more about it, and I wish you not to forget that statement. At the same time, if they do dovetail at all, I don't want you to know anything about the one that I have in hand."

"I am beginning to understand you now."

"If the cases do run together, before either of them are completed, you and I will either be working in harmony, or we will be working against each other. I want you to take your own case without a touch of prejudice, and I wish to take up the one I have, also without prejudice. Now, aren't you willing to let it go at that, and do as I ask you?"

"Sure. But if we should find that we are working against each other——"

"How persistent you are! That is twice I have had to make that remark."

"Well?"

"If we do find that we are working against each other,

something will occur to demonstrate to us which is on the right side. We will come together—if my ideas about it are correct—before we have delved very far into it."

"Do I understand that I am absolutely to say nothing to you about the case until you ask me to do so?" asked Chick.

"You are to understand exactly that. No more; no less."

"Even if I find that we are opposed to each other?"

"You are to conduct your case as if you were really Nick Carter ,and as if I, as another person, did not exist."

"Suppose I should want some assistance—am I to take either of the boys?"

"You may have Ten-Ichi; I will detail him to you for this case. I will take Patsy."

"Gee, Nick, it looks as if this was to be a sort of rivalry case."

"It does look a little bit like that, on the face of it. But as a matter of fact it is not. It is only a situation where there are two cases which seem to bear some relation to each other and which bid fair to become more closely related before they are finished. If I am correct about them, that is the way it will turn out; and again, if I am right about them, one of them must be wrong. My whole idea is to find out which is right."

Chick read the letter through a third time.

"Chester speaks about a conspiracy," he said. "He calls it a left-over conspiracy. That would suggest that it is one that he has inherited from his days in the Klondike; eh?"

"I have told you," replied the detective, with a quiet smile, "that I don't want to discuss the case with you."

"Then I'll bet a fiver that you already know pretty nearly what this man Chester has got to say to me to-night."

Nick laughed aloud.

"I don't know a thing more about it than you do, Chick," he said. "Understand me, I said I do not *know* a thing more about it than you do. If I have been guessing something about it, that is because of the other case I have referred to; it is because I have got the idea of a distinct relation between the two—and it would not be fair even to guess about it just now."

"When did you get the other case, Nick?"

"I haven't got it yet; it is coming."

"Do you mean that you are simply guessing about the whole thing?"

"No. I am expecting a call here to-night, at about the time you will be closeted with Mr. Godfrey Chester. The case which I will have will develop then—at the same time that you are learning the particulars of your case."

Chick left his chair and strode across the room with some impatience.

"I don't see what's the good of being so mysterious," he said, with some show of petulance.

"I don't mean to be mysterious, Chick," said the detective. "I have told you already much more than I intended to say in the beginning. The point is this: There is a case, represented by that letter from Godfrey Chester, which for reasons of my own I don't wish to take up. I *do* wish, also for reasons of my own, that Godfrey Chester should be made to believe that Nick Carter is handling his case. Therefore I send you to represent me, and to take the case in my name and to conduct it to the end in my name. I don't see that there is anything mysterious about that; and—I don't wish to hear any more talk about it, Chick. If you don't——"

"You know I *do* want to take it."

"Then stop talking about it and do as I say."

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE MIXTURE OF NAMES.

As soon as the detective was alone after the departure of Chick, he took another letter from his pocket—one that had arrived by post—and having spread it open before him, proceeded to read it for the third time since it came into his possession. It was as follows:

Mr. Nicholas Carter, Detective, New York City.

"DEAR SIR: I am going to ask you to read this letter through to the end, and afterward to grant me an interview with you at your home to-night. I will call at eight o'clock and then go more completely into the details of the case that are only referred to here.

"Eight years ago there were two men who were partners, living in Arizona. They owned a large ranch together, on which they raised cattle and horses for the Eastern markets. They prospered, and as wealth goes—or as it was considered at that time in that part of the country—they became wealthy. Their names were, respectively, Godfrey Chester, and Chester Godfrey. (This, being a mere transposition of the two names, will impress you as somewhat remarkable, but the fact is that the two men were what is known as double cousins; that is to say, the father of Godfrey Chester, and the mother of Chester Godfrey, were own cousins, and also the mother of Godfrey Chester and the father of Chester Godfrey were own cousins.) It is not surprising, as you will admit, that under the circumstances there was a strong personal resemblance between the two men.

"You must not understand that this resemblance was so striking that the two men were mistaken one for the other, among their friends, for Godfrey Chester was dark, almost to swarthiness, with black hair and brows, while his cousin, Chester Godfrey, was considerably lighter of complexion and hair. Both had gray eyes, were of the same height, and had many mannerisms in common. Even their voices were not dissimilar. Among their intimates they were known familiarly as 'Black Chet' and 'Brown Chet.'

"Now, notwithstanding the fact that the two men were partners and appeared to live together and conduct their affairs together in perfect harmony, the fact was that they were bitter enemies; each distrusted and watched the other; and each longed for the death of the other, and they would no doubt have flown at each other's throats at almost any time had it not been for some oath to a third party which stood between them forcing them against their wills never to attempt any form of violence against each other. In their daily intercourse they were scrupulously polite toward each other. When it chanced that they rode into Tombstone or to St. Johns together, they were outwardly friends.

"That the two men were bound together by ties which neither could, or would, sever, and that each hated the chains which did bind them together, cannot be doubted; but it is equally evident that neither would take the initiative of separation and that both felt the obligations of their oaths and lived up to them to the letter, if not exactly in the spirit.

"This condition of things had been going on for ten years at the time of which I write—eight years ago; so it may be said to have begun about eighteen years ago; and then, for a reason which is not explained, the two men separated. He who was known as Black Chet—that is, Godfrey Chester—withdrew from the ranch-life in Arizona and went to the Klondike. The writer does not know if there was a settlement of interest between the two men before they separated, or not. This happened eight years ago.

"Four years ago the one who was known as Brown Chet sold the ranch and all that it contained, and also went away from Arizona, and it is not known definitely where he went after leaving there.

"Now, sir, that is a brief history of the two men whose lives I am going to ask you to investigate for me, and a brief paragraph will explain my reasons.

"The original source of enmity between the double cousins was a woman, and that woman was my mother. She died when I was three years old. One of those men to whom I have referred was her husband and therefore my father; but I do not know which one.

"It is certain that Black Chet, after going to Alaska, made an immense fortune. It is presumptively certain that his cousin followed him to that country four years after he went to it. It is almost certain that one of those men is dead and that the other lives. One, who calls himself Godfrey Chester, and who in appearance is the original Black Chet, lives now in this city.

"I am now twenty-two years old. Four years ago I began to search for my father. My researches took me to Arizona, where I arrived shortly after the departure of Brown Chet. Later, I went to the Klondike. Now, I have returned to New York, and have determined to call upon you to aid me.

"You will think that this is a strange letter, but the details of it I will explain when I have an opportunity to converse personally with you. May I hope that you will receive me this evening and that you will be able to devote some time to me? I sign this letter with the only name I have ever borne, which was my mother's maiden name.

Yours very truly,

"VERNON HARCOURT."

The detective put the letter aside with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It is rather a remarkable coincidence," he mused aloud, "that I should have received the two letters the same day, neither of which would have impressed me very greatly without the other one; and what makes the coincidence still more remarkable is this *third* letter, which came yesterday."

He now took a third letter from his pocket, which he also read over. It was:

"NOME, ALASKA, July 4, 1906.

"DEAR CARTER: I don't suppose you have forgotten my existence, although it is rather more than four years since you have seen me or heard from me. When I left Idaho I came here to this country, and I have done fairly well, at that. I shall be in New York about a month—maybe less—after you receive this, so you need not bother to answer it; but I wish you would find out something for me in the meantime, if you can, so that you will be able to tell me about it when I arrive.

"There has been a chap up here in this country who has an odd name, which he transposes to suit his convenience. Sometimes he has called himself Godfrey Chester, and sometimes it is Chester Godfrey. All I want to know about him is if he has happened to turn up in New York, and if he is not there, if you could locate him for me. I'll do the rest when I get there. I think you should have no difficulty in locating him, unless perhaps he has kept right on to some place in Europe—which isn't at all unlikely. He should be posing as a billionaire, and not without some reason, too.

"That's all for the present. Believe me, I am now, as always,

"Your cowboy and miner friend,

"BUCK HAWKINS."

As the detective laid the letter aside with the other one, Patsy entered the room, and after a moment Nick asked him:

"Patsy, do you remember Buck Hawkins?"

"I should say yes. You bet I do," replied the assistant.

"Here is a letter from him. Would you like to read it?"

"Sure."

Nick tossed the letter to Patsy and watched him while he read it; then he said:

"You know Buck fairly well, Patsy. What would you say about that letter?"

"I should say," replied Patsy slowly, "that if my name was Godfrey Chester or Chester Godfrey, I'd go to the legislature and get it changed before Buck Hawkins gets here. Buck says here, 'I'll do the rest when I get there'; and Buck doesn't make statements like that without meaning them."

Nick nodded, and Patsy continued:

"Buck and that chap he refers to have run up against each other in the North, and this man he refers to as the billionaire hasn't been on the level. Anyhow Buck has 'got it in' for him for some reason, and Buck is coming all the way here to settle the question. That is about the size of it. Buck wants you to locate him so as to save time."

Nick nodded again.

"I'd about as soon have a panther on my trail in the woods as to have Buck Hawkins after me," continued Patsy. "He doesn't know how to change his mind when once he has it made up to anything; and if he is looking for Mr. Godfrey Chester Chester Godfrey's scalp, he will come pretty near getting it before he is through."

"You are about right about that, Patsy," said the detective. "Now, here are two more letters that I would like to have you read. Tell me what you think about the whole situation, after you have read both of them."

It was the letter signed Vernon Harcourt which the detective handed to his assistant first; and then, when he had finished reading it, and before Patsy could make any remark about it, he gave him the one that the messenger-boy had brought to the house—the one from the billionaire himself.

"Well," said Nick with a smile, "what do you think about the whole thing, Patsy?"

"It is rather mixed, isn't it?"

"Yes. It would appear so, on the face of it."

"Looks as if you had been retained on both sides of the question—whatever that question may prove to be. You can't very well take both sides of the case, can you?"

"I have already detailed Chick and Ten-Ichi to attend to the billionaire."

"Good! And you are going to let me work with you, eh?"

"Yes; if there is a case."

"Isn't it a fairly sure thing that there is a case where Buck Hawkins looms up in it?" asked the young assistant.

"Oh, yes. There is doubtless a case somewhere there."

"It looks to me——" began Patsy; and then he stopped.

"Go on," said the detective, with an encouraging smile. "I would like to hear what your impressions about it are."

"Well, according to this Harcourt letter, those two chaps who lived together so long in Arizona hated each other like poison all the time, and finally when one of them could stand it no longer, he lit out and went to the Klondike. After a while the other one followed him, and then one of them has killed the other."

Nick nodded. "Go on," he said.

"There doesn't seem to be any 'go on' about it until we hear the stories that are promised; in fact, it seems to me that Buck Hawkins holds the key to the situation."

Again the detective nodded his head.

"There you have the idea, Patsy," he said. "There wouldn't be any case at all here, save to find out for young Harcourt who was his father, if that is possible, if it weren't for Buck—and Buck's knowledge of the situation does not begin, evidently, until after the one who was known as Brown Chet—that is, the second one—disappeared from Arizona. I wonder, Patsy, if that Harcourt letter made the same impression upon you that it did upon me."

"I don't know," replied Patsy musingly. "The only impression I got from it was that if it were not for the signature, which seems to be masculine, I should have said that the letter was written by a woman."

"Good, my lad! That is precisely the idea that I had about it. The letter sounds feminine from beginning to end, even though the name Vernon is masculine. I think we will stop conjecturing about it now, and wait the coming of the writer of the Harcourt letter. I only wish that Buck might have arrived here first."

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERY OF THE KLONDIKE.

Buck Hawkins did arrive first, as the detective had wished he would do.

It was shortly after four o'clock in the afternoon when the detective and his assistant were discussing the case, and they had not yet finished the discourse when Joseph came to the door of the room where they were seated to announce that:

"Mr. Buck Hawkins is in the reception-room, sir."

"Bring him right up here, Joseph," the detective ordered; and in a moment more the huge figure of the cowboy-miner almost filled the doorway.

"I reckon you got my letter, Nick?" he announced, rather than asked, by way of greeting.

"Yes, Buck," replied the detective; "but it only came here to-day. I was not expecting you for another month at least."

"Well, you see, Nick, I managed to follow it rather sooner than I expected when I wrote it. I found that I could wind up my business there and get out a leetle quicker than I hoped to do when I wrote the letter; and I ain't let the grass grow under my feet since I started."

"Sit down, Buck, and help yourself to a cigar. I am mighty glad to see you. Do you remember Patsy?"

"Sure, I remember Patsy! How are you, Pat? Now, Nick, I reckon we might as well get right down to business, eh? Don't you think so?"

"I don't see any advantage to be gained by losing time, Buck; but all the same you might wait till you get your breath."

"I haven't lost a mite of it, Nick. I never do. Did you say you only got the letter to-day? Eh?"

"Yes."

"Then I suppose you ain't had no time to look up the locality of that galoot I asked you about, have you?"

"It so happens that I know where he is already, Buck."

"Do you now? Well, that's fine."

"He is living here in the city; has lately bought a very fine house—a sort of mansion where he is living in great style."

"That's him, all right. I said he would be posing as a millionaire, didn't I?"

"You did; and you also said it would not be without some reason, Buck."

"That's all right, too. He's got reason enough—that is to say, there is money enough to enable him to do that all right. The only question that arises is this: *Is it his money?*"

"Oh! I see," said the detective.

"Well, I'm mighty glad that somebody sees, for I don't," was Buck's rather ambiguous remark. "I tell you, Nick, there is a thundering great big mystery about that chap, and one that has got to be solved, too, before I let up on him."

"I think, Buck," said the detective, "that if you will begin by telling me your story, so that I will know what you are talking about, it will simplify matters very much. It is only about four years ago that you went to the Klondike yourself, isn't it?"

"That's all. I made the acquaintance of one of 'em on the way up there."

"One of whom?"

"One of them two galoots—or the 'double.' You see, I have never been quite able to make out whether there is really one man, or two men."

"I will suggest again that you tell me your story, from the beginning of your acquaintance with the man to whom you are referring."

"Well, it was on the steamship that took me up there. I took a vessel all the way to Nome, and after a day or two out I made the acquaintance of a man named Godfrey Chester; leastwise that is what he *said* his name was, although it was on the purser's book as Chester Godfrey. I happened to discover that little fact and I mentioned it to him, and his reply was to laugh and say that it made no difference which way the names were put; that he was named one way as often as the other, and it was all the same."

"Describe his appearance to me, Buck," said the detective.

"He was—and is, I suppose—as handsome a man as you would meet in a long distance. As tall, almost, as I am, well put together, as lithe and as graceful as a panther, with great, soft gray eyes, jet-black hair and mustache, and hands and feet almost like a woman's."

"Black hair? Did you say black hair, Buck?" asked the detective.

"I did."

"Jet black?"

"Yes; as black as a Spaniard's. Why?"

"I only wanted to be exact. You spoke of his having a double, didn't you?"

"Yes. Or rather I said that I could never quite make out whether there was one man or two men. What of it?"

"I was only curious to know if the other one—or the supposed other one, had hair of the same color?"

"Sure thing."

"There was no difference in the shade of it?"

"Not that anybody would notice. I'd like to know why you are so particular about the color of the galoot's hair, Nick?"

"I will explain that to you later. But I will say this now: Your letter about this man is not the only one I have received about him, and about somebody who looks like him, too. But go ahead with your story. You met him on the ship going to Nome, you say?"

"Yes. We scraped acquaintance, as men will on such a voyage, and we became rather chummy. He was a likable chap, I thought, and I rather took a fancy to him—so much so in fact that I told him one day that I had no partner and that if he cared to hook up with me we'd bunch our interests, share and share alike. Before the voyage was ended we got to calling each other Buck and Chet, same's if we'd been pards from way back."

"Was it 'Black Chet' or 'Brown Chet'?" asked the detective quietly.

The miner stared for a moment, and then he broke into a short laugh.

"I tell you, Nick," he said at last, "there are times when you sort of take the wind out of my sails, so to speak. Now, for example, I'd like to know how you ever heard anything at all about a 'Black Chet' and a 'Brown Chet.'"

"I gather from your question," replied the detective, "that there was some use of one or the other of those names—or of both of them; eh?"

"Yes. That's no dream."

"I happen to know," continued the detective, "that originally there were two of those men who were cousins, and who looked very much alike, save that one had jet-black hair and the other's hair was brown. At that time they lived in Arizona——"

"He often told me that he came from Arizona," interrupted the miner.

"They lived in Arizona, and their acquaintances in order to distinguish them one from the other adopted the plan of calling one 'Black Chet,' and the other one 'Brown Chet.' Now which was this one whom you knew?"

"Well, Nick, I never knew that he was either one or the other until after we had been together almost a year. And then it came about by accident."

"How was it?"

"We had knocked off work for a month or two and gone into the city, as we called it, for a sort of rest. We had been there only a couple of days when Chet came face to face with an old acquaintance who sung out the minute he saw him, 'Hullo, Black Chet! Where'd you drop down from?' The two shook hands as if they were long-lost brothers, and I walked on a little way to give them a chance to chew the rag together if they wanted to. When I looked around toward them, they were going in the opposite direction—and I didn't see any more of my partner for three days after that."

"How was that?" asked the detective.

"Well, I never rightly knew just how or why it was. When Chet showed up again he told me that he had gone out a ways along the trail with his old friend to show him the way. But I will tell you right now that that stranger who had called my partner Black Chet was never seen again anywhere in the Klondike."

"Do you mean to tell me——" began the detective; but Buck interrupted him.

"I don't mean to tell you anything at all about it," he said. "I have told you all I know already. I thought nothing about it at the time, and would never have given it another thought, I suppose, if it had not been for things that happened after that. But now I thoroughly believe that Chet found a way to put his old acquaintance out of the way, lest he should betray him.

"Once, after we had returned to the mine, I asked him about being called Black Chet, and he told me in effect what you have already said: That he had once had a cousin who lived with him down in Arizona, who looked very much like him, and who, to distinguish him, was called by the name of Brown Chet, because his hair was brown instead of black. *But he also told me that his cousin had died before he left Arizona.*"

The detective nodded. "I am beginning to get a faint idea of the layout," he said. "Go on, Buck."

"Well, I'll make the story as short as I can. You must remember that when we met aboard the ship I was on my way to that part of the world for the first time. You must remember, also, that I supposed the same of him. In fact he told me as much."

"Yes."

"I asked him plainly if he had ever been in the North before, and he said he had not. But he did say that his cousin had been up there."

"I see," said the detective. "Go on."

"You know, Nick, that I am always on the level and on the square, and I'm so cussed trusting in my nature, that I go on the principle of thinking that everybody else is the same until I find out different; eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I took him on faith in just that way. I never thought of doubting him—not until that episode happened of his meeting with the acquaintance. And even after that, too."

"Well?"

"All the same, when we first took the trail to go prospecting, it struck me that he was a whole lot better posted than he ought to be for a chap who had never been in that region at all. Once I mentioned the idea, but he only laughed and replied that his cousin had described the localities to him so often and had drawn so many plans for him to follow when he should arrive himself, that it was almost the same as if he had been there before.

"Well, we finally struck a place where he thought we had better stop and stake out our claims, which we did, although it did not appeal to me as much as it appeared to do to him; and after that I often noticed that he seemed to know exactly where he was and exactly what to do.

"We worked together for over a year, all told, and then I became dissatisfied with the results of what we were doing and wanted to light out for another place. The fact was that he didn't do half the work, but left it all to me while he was off mooning around, trying, he told me, to find a place that his cousin had described to him.

"I got tired of that sort of thing after a while, and told him so. He allowed that if I didn't like his way of doing things I was at liberty to light out at any time I pleased."

"And so you separated?" asked the detective.

"One word led to another, until we almost had a scrap about it; but the upshot of it was that he finally offered me a lump sum for my interests there, which I accepted; and I left the claim one day with only what I could carry on my back—and five thousand dollars in currency in my pouch, which he had given me for my share. That was two and a half years ago. Nick, *but it is only within the last six months that I have been able to remember anything at all about it.*"

"What do you mean?" asked the detective quickly. "How was that?"

"It was because when I camped the second time after leaving him, and rolled myself in my blanket, to rest and sleep, I didn't wake up again, to know anything, until six months ago. That sounds somewhat remarkable, but if you'll listen a minute, I will explain."

CHAPTER IV.

EVIDENCE OF A GREAT CRIME.

The detective smiled somewhat indulgently, for he did not as yet understand.

"It sounds as if you became a sort of second Rip Van Winkle," he said, "only that Rip slept twenty years while you slept only two, Buck."

"It is no laughing matter from my standpoint, Nick—you can bet your life on that!"

"Tell me about it."

"All that I know about it is what has been told to me since I woke up—or words to that effect—and what I can make out by piecing two and two together, since that time."

"Well, tell me about it."

"When I came to my senses, and began to remember who I was and to recall things that had happened to me in the past, it was, as I say, about six months ago. There were two years of my life that remained, and which still remain, a perfect blank to me—save for what I have been told about them, of course."

The detective nodded.

"You must know that at the time I passed into oblivion, so to speak, it was summer up there. We had almost no night at all—nothing that you could call night, as we understand the meaning of the word in this part of the world."

"I understand."

"All the same, after a man has traveled about eighteen hours across that rugged country, with a heavy pack on his back, he feels like lying down to rest and sleep, and it doesn't make any difference to him that the sun is still shining, like it does here just before it sets."

The detective nodded.

"Well, as I was saying, it was the second time that I camped after leaving my old partner. I was plumb tired out, but I managed to make myself a little coffee and to eat a bite or two before I rolled myself in my blanket and sought sleep. I don't remember a thing after that."

"Except what you have been told."

"That's the idea—except what I have been told."

"Well, what was that?"

"Some time after that—or as near as I have been able to figure it, judging from the time I left Black Chet and the time when I was found—about a month after that, I wandered in at a mining camp where nobody knew me at all. I was plumb daffy; locoed, we used to call it in Nevada and Idaho. My clothes were in rags; I was only a skeleton of skin and bones, and I was so crusted with dirt and blood that had dried on me, that the men in that camp didn't know whether I was an Injun or a white man at first, save that my hair had grown out considerable and there was a lot of it on my face, too."

"Go on."

"There had been an ugly wound, made by a bullet, evidently, along the crown of my head. You can see the scar there now, although I keep it covered with my hair; see?"

"Yes."

"I was emaciated, almost starved, and so weak that I could only drag myself along when I was found just outside that camp. But they were good fellows, all right. They took me in and cared for me, and bit by bit brought me around and fed me up until I was as strong as ever.

"But the point is, Nick, my memory was gone. I didn't know my own name. I had no idea who I was or where I came from, or what had hurt me; but they tell me I was docile and good-natured always and perfectly willing to do whatever sort of work I was asked to do.

"Well, Nick, to make a long story shorter, I stayed there in that camp almost two years with that outfit, working with them and helping them and never asking any favor in return, only a place to sleep and plenty to eat and something to wear.

"They told me afterward that I was like a child, only that I was always silent unless spoken to.

"They had struck it rich there, and so remained on their claims during those two years, after I was found—or it was nearly as long as that. Then they decided to clean up and get out, and they took me with them to Nome—a distance of about four hundred miles."

"Wasn't there anybody in Nome who remembered you?"

"No. Two years is a long time up there. And besides you must remember that I was in Nome before Black Chet and I took the trail only a very short time."

"Yes."

"But there happened to be a great surgeon there from Germany. He had gone to the Klondike as much for his health as to dig for gold. He happened to hear the story about me, and he took an interest in my case."

"And operated on you?"

"Wait a moment. Yes. My friends who had cared for me told him the story about finding me. They described the appearance of my wound at the time, and in short told him everything. Then he examined me and said that he could cure me."

The detective nodded.

"He performed some sort of an operation on me," continued Buck. "Took out a piece of my skull and put it back again, and I'll give you my word, Nick, that when I woke up after that, my first recollection was that I had taken a little coffee and a bite to eat, after which I had rolled myself in my blanket and laid down to sleep. In short, I thought I was right at the place where I had camped the second time after leaving Black Chet, two years before."

"I understand," said the detective.

"I won't bother you with all the perplexities that came

after that, when I tried to get things straight in my mind. It was an awful job."

"I can well believe that."

"At first I totally refused to believe that two years, almost, had passed since that time. The idea of it was preposterous; but finally they made me believe it. Then I found that the outfit that had rescued me was so square that they had set aside my share of the gold produced in those two years. It was like making me a present, for I knew nothing at all about it; but all the same I was fifty thousand richer. They insisted upon my taking my share; said I had earned it, and all that, and the upshot of it was that I took it."

"They were square all right," commented the detective.

"You bet your life."

"And what happened then?"

"Bit by bit I got things straight in my mind. I learned that the leather pouch in which I had carried my five thousand dollars when I laid down to sleep, was not on me when I turned up at the mining camp a month later. I asked about my old partner, but for a time could discover nothing about him at all; but after a while I discovered that he had struck it mighty rich; had sold out a controlling interest in his mines to an English syndicate, and had gone back to the States six months before I showed up. See, Nick?"

"Yes. I am beginning to understand."

"Then, somehow, the memory of that old acquaintance of his that he had met, and with whom he had gone out a way on the trail, came back to me. I recalled the fact that I had never heard anything about him after that, and I asked some questions about him; see?"

"Yes."

"He had never been seen nor heard of. Well, I began to have strong suspicions that my partner, Black Chet, had followed me after I left him and had shot me while I slept; that he had robbed me after that, and left me for dead; but somehow I didn't think that he had followed and shot me just to get back the five thousand. I suspected there must be a deeper motive than that."

The detective nodded.

"Anyhow I took the trail back to our old claims; the ones I had sold out to him for the five thousand; and I found out there, Nick, that all the time I had supposed him to be mooning around, prospecting, when I supposed he was only too lazy to work, he had been working on another claim three or four miles from there, the existence of which I had never suspected."

"He had kept it a secret from you, eh?"

"Evidently that, but he had known about it all the while, evidently. The condition of it was proof of that. It had been worked almost to the point of perfect development before we ever went into that country together.

"By rights, you see, I had a claim upon that mine, too; but it was now sold to that English syndicate, which is so rich that they can't count their money, and I saw there was no use in trying to do anything with them. Their title was perfect. Mine was only a moral one. See?"

"Yes."

"I went back to Nome, and I want to tell you, Nick, that I spent weeks alone in a cabin I hired, writing down, time after time, all the things I could remember about that old partner of mine; all the things he had ever said to me; all the strange actions of his, which I had not thought strange at the time, but which were mighty strange as they came back to me."

"It was a good idea, Buck, writing all that down."

"It helped me to piece things together."

"It is the course I would have pursued myself, Buck."

"Well, before I got through—by the time I wrote you that letter—I had made out a very good story, I thought, and one which was fairly well connected all through; and I had accomplished another thing which was quite as important—I had pulled myself together entirely, and had got entirely back to my normal condition of memory. By continued mental effort I even succeeded in recalling much that had happened to me during the two years of imbecility; or rather of forgetfulness."

"That is rather remarkable."

"Of course none of it was clear. It was like recalling a dream; but there were gleams of memory, all the same."

"Now tell me what you had made out of the story."

"Remember that I wrote it after weeks of careful study."

"Yes."

"That I did it by beginning at the time I met up with Black Chet on the ship, and by writing down carefully not only everything that I could recall that he had ever said to me, but also every act of his, however trivial, that I could remember."

"Yes."

"Well, I made out of it all this: That Black Chet wasn't Black Chet at all, but Brown Chet; that Black Chet had gone to the Klondike long before I met up with this chap, and had found the rich claim which is now the big bonanza; see?"

"Yes."

"That Brown Chet had followed him there later on, murdered him, disguised himself as his cousin, and then returned to the States for a trip; or that Black Chet—the original fellow, I mean—had gone back to the States after making his strike, had told his cousin about it, and that the latter had killed him somewhere down in the States, and then gone north to find the claims, acting upon the information that Black Chet had given him. Do you understand all that I mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, if the first idea is the correct one, the murder was committed up there, and Brown Chet went south

after it, for a blind, meeting up with me on his return; while if the second idea is the correct one, it was Brown Chet's first trip to the North when I encountered him on the steamer, and he was only acting on the information he had received from his cousin."

"In either case," said the detective, "you are satisfied that the man you met on the ship was not the man who originally located the claims, and was not the original Black Chet, but was Brown Chet, with his hair dyed black—Brown Chet, who had murdered his cousin."

"That's the idea; and who afterward murdered another chap who came from the same part of the country and who might have betrayed him—*and* who afterward tried to murder me, and who thought, and *still thinks*, that he did so. Do you see the point now?"

"Yes," said Nick, "I do."

CHAPTER V.

BUCK HAWKINS HAS AN ACCOUNT TO SETTLE.

"It is certain," continued the miner, "that one of those fellows was up there in that country long before I went there. To the best of my figuring, I make it about four years. I found a lot of fellows around there who remembered such a man as long before as that was; but he was always described to me as dark, like the one I had known, but as distinctly soft spoken and gentle in his manner, which my partner never was."

"Tell me what you were told about that one."

"Only that he appeared there, as everybody else does, and hung around Nome for a time until he sort of got the lay of the land and figured out about what part of the diggings he would head for. And then he went away into the wilds, like so many others do who never return or are seen again.

"I was told that it was more than two years before he reappeared, and those who remembered him thought him dead, when of a sudden he showed up again.

"He purchased a lot of provisions, hired some Indians to go with him, and disappeared once more toward the northwest. Then, after about a year and a half more, he reappeared; and right here I am stumped a little."

"What about?"

"Here is where I don't know whether it was the original chap who showed up, or whether it was the other one, whom I afterward knew. There were those who told me that when he appeared the last time, he did not act exactly the same; but before they had time to think what the difference might be, he disappeared again, and there wasn't one there who could tell me whether he went south, toward the States, or if he returned again to the wilds.

"More than that, they could not assure me that he came out of the wilds when he appeared that last time. They would not be sure that he had not come directly from the States, at that time; so you see I can't really tell whether it was the original Black Chet they saw then who had come down from his claims and departed southward, or the other fellow who had just shown up who traveled north to find his cousin—and kill him."

"I think," said the detective, "that the first idea is the correct one. I think it was the original one who came down out of the north and probably traveled right on to the States."

"Why?"

"Because, if it had been the other fellow who had gone north to search for his cousin, he would not have known where to search for him, beyond Nome."

"You're right about that."

"It was the original—the man you never saw—who came down to Nome at that time, Buck. I don't think there is any doubt of that."

"Well, anyhow, after that time there was nothing seen of the man, whichever one he was, until I arrived there on the steamer with him."

"Then we must decide the question about like this," said the detective. "First, I happen to know, because of another letter I have received about those men, that there were two cousins, named respectively Godfrey Chester and Chester Godfrey. The former was called Black Chet, and the latter Brown Chet. I also know that Godfrey Chester went to the Klondike as long ago as eight years, and that Chester Godfrey disappeared, probably to go there also, four years ago.

"The two men had formerly lived together on a large ranch in Arizona, where they had made considerable money. They were bound together by some oath or promise that had been made to a woman, which neither would break; but the time apparently came when they were released from the obligations of their oath, and parted. Godfrey Chester went to the Klondike, and his cousin, Chester Godfrey, remained on the ranch. Now, after that, we must—we can do no more—than surmise."

"Correct, Nick."

"So in surmising or guessing, we must imagine that Godfrey Chester went straight to the North, and went out to the diggings, or washings, whichever it was. He was gone from Nome, you say, two years or more before he reappeared. Then he showed up again, bought provisions, hired Indians, and departed again, and after another year or more he showed up again."

"Yes."

"We must conclude, then, that by this time he had made his strike; that his change in demeanor was because he did not wish to take anybody into his confidence and did not want any one even to guess that he had made a strike."

"Well?"

"He therefore kept very quiet; had very little to say to

anybody, and finally, without announcing his intention to any person, slipped away to the States."

"I guess that's about the idea."

"We must further conclude that for some reason know only to himself and his cousin, he went directly to the old ranch in Arizona. Possibly there was some agreement between the cousins as to that, and he went there directly, in order to stand to it."

"That is very likely."

"Now, if there was a murder—if Chester Godfrey killed Godfrey Chester, it was done there at the ranch, after which Chester Godfrey, or Brown Chet, sold out and went away. The probability is that nobody knew that Godfrey Chester had reappeared there at all."

"That's so, Nick."

"So Chester Godfrey had only to sell out and go. His cousin had already been absent almost if not quite four years, or even more. When he got far enough away to make the necessary alterations in his appearance, he did so, changing his hair from brown to black, and supplying himself with a sufficient quantity of dye to keep it so.

"You see, Buck, he had probably got all the information that was necessary about the rich claim. He knew that he could find it by the directions that his cousin had given him, or by the aid of maps and plans he had found in his possession after he had killed him."

"That's it, Nick."

"He went to the Klondike meaning to pass himself off as his own cousin. While on the way there he preferred to give you the impression that he had not been there before, fearing that you might ask embarrassing questions if you thought he had. Anyhow, it made no difference to you, and was none of your business.

"But a little later he discovered that, although you had never been to the Klondike, you were an experienced miner. You offered him partnership and he accepted, because he wanted the services of an experienced miner; and right there, Buck, he determined to kill you as soon as you had fulfilled your usefulness."

"By jingo, Nick, you hit it that time!"

"Well, Buck, as I look at the situation, that brings us down to date; eh?"

"It does—just about."

"And that also brings me to some information on the subject that I have at hand to give to you. But first, I want you to answer some questions for me."

"Anything you like to ask, Nick."

"I want to know, first, why—exactly why—you have come all this distance in search of this man, whom we must conclude is Chester Godfrey, although he calls himself Godfrey Chester. Will you tell me that?"

"Sure. I'll tell you. There isn't any reason why I should not, that I know of."

"Then tell me."

"I have come to have a settlement with him."

"What sort of a settlement?"

Buck looked at the detective for a moment with a quizzical smile on his homely face, and then, with his characteristic drawl, and ticking each item off on his fingers as he did so, he replied:

"Well, Nick, I reckon there's quiet a little account to settle up. Shall I go over it in detail?"

"Yes."

"First and foremost, there's that little matter of five thousand dollars that he lifted off me when he shot me; and then——"

"You don't know that it was he who shot you, Buck."

"I choose to think it was, and anyhow, it is charged to his account. That's one, eh?"

"Yes."

"There's his original partnership agreement with me, made on board the ship, by word of mouth, but just as binding as if it were on parchment and under seal; and that partnership included anything he already knew about as well as anything he should happen to find up afterward while he was in my company. That's right, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"So you see if that claim, or those claims were his cousins, and he chose to think that he had inherited them, because he knew pretty nearly where to find them, or even if he did not know about them till he went mooning off on his own hook after we arrived at the diggings, a half of the whole thing is none the less mine; that's right, ain't it?"

"Morally it is, yes."

"He sold out for a figure that is away up in the millions, and the interest he retains makes him worth a hundred million more—or even more than that. Half of all that is mine."

"Well?" said Nick, with a smile. "What more?"

"There's a lot more. He owes me for that wound on the top of my head, that laid me on a shelf for two years. He owes me for two years of inactivity. I have put that down at a million, and I think that is very decent of me, considering everything; don't you?"

"Perhaps. What more?"

"There's the wear and tear on my personal feelings and affections. I haven't exactly put a figure on that, and I won't till I hear what he's got to say about it."

"Go on. Anything more?"

"Well, there are quite a lot of items which I won't stop now to enumerate: but I have got 'em all saved up and on my mind all right."

"The thing I wish to know is, what are you going to ask him to do when you have your interview with him, Buck?"

"I ain't exactly made my mind up complete about that. But I'm going to tell him that half of all he's got is mine,

and that if he don't pony up, I'll take the whole—or take *him*."

"Exactly. That is what I was getting at."

"What do you mean by that, Nick?"

"I was only trying to find out what you intended to do in case he should laugh at you, tell you to get out, and give you what the street boys in New York call the merry ha-ha. I know now."

"Do you?"

"Yes; you are contemplating telling him that if he doesn't come to your terms, you will serve him as you believe he served you, only that you will shoot straighter than he did."

"Nick, you're a great guesser!"

"It isn't guessing, Buck; it is all because I know you so well."

"Well, you hit it, anyhow. The sum total of all he owes me foots up with five letters, and they are d-e-a-t-h; but I have thought the matter over carefully, and made up my mind that he can buy off if he just squares himself as he should."

"And do you suppose for a moment, Buck, that you can do such a thing as you propose, here in this country, exactly as you would do it if you were up there in the North?"

"I don't reckon that I've calculated much on the locality, Nick, about doing it. It don't make a rap's difference to me whether mister 'whatchucallim' is in Nome, or New York, Ticonterogie, or Hades when I get ready to unlimber. He's got to pony up or take the consequences—and I'd a whole lot rather he would refuse, so's to give me a good excuse for killing him, if anybody should crawl up the pike and ask you. But he has got to do one thing or the other; he had got to give up the 'dust,' or he has got to give up the 'ghost!' You hear me!"

CHAPTER VI.

A MOST MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

The detective was silent for a little while after Buck made that last statement about his intentions; and then without comment of any kind he passed over to him the letter that was signed "Vernon Harcourt," and said:

"Read that letter through to the end, Buck, and then tell me what you think of it."

The miner did so, with pursed-up lips and wrinkled brow; and when he had finished he returned the letter quietly to the detective.

"I think I have heard something about that young chap," he said. "He is coming here to see you at eight o'clock this evening, according to that letter; eh?"

"Yes."

"I had forgotten all about him, Nick; but now that the letter has brought it back to me, I remember that I have heard about Vernon Harcourt."

"Tell me what you have heard, Buck."

"Well, it wasn't till after I recovered from my two years on the shelf and was making my researches in order to set myself straight that the existence of Vernon Harcourt was brought to my attention; but then, when I was making all the careful inquiries I did, there was an old chap there in Nome who told me about a young feller who had been up there making inquiries. He remembered the name, too."

"What was told you about him?"

"Nothin' only that he looked more like a girl dressed up as a boy, than anything else; and it was his idea that he was a girl, really. He went there and began at once making inquiries about Godfrey Chester, or Chester Godfrey; he insisted that there were two men instead of one, and that doubtless they were together somewhere in that country. But there wasn't any information to be obtained about them, and after a short time the young feller disappeared. I couldn't find out whether he took ship and returned to the States or if he went off into the wilds looking for them. That's all. It is most time for Vernon Harcourt to be here now, isn't it?"

"Yes." Nick looked at his watch. "He should be here, if he is prompt, in a very few minutes."

"Do you reckon that I'd better wait and see him, too, or shall I light out and see you later, Nick?"

"You might as well wait—for the present at least," replied the detective. "Hark! There is the bell now."

A moment later they could hear Joseph passing through the hall to the front door; then they heard a loud voice talking rapidly, with a distinct Irish brogue, and then Joseph came hurrying toward the room where the detective and Patsy and Buck Hawkins were still seated.

But Nick knew already that something had happened that was not on the program, and he was not surprised therefore when he sprang forward and threw open the door to find Joseph already there, and standing in the hall, directly behind him, the driver of a public conveyance.

"Sure, sir," said the driver, before Joseph could speak at all, "I've got a dead man in me hack who came to call on you."

The announcement would have been funny had it been less tragic; but Nick did not wait to ask questions of the driver. He preferred to see at once for himself if the information was correct.

He started forward, hurried past the driver, and was out at the door to the hack which stood against the curb in front of the house.

The door of the hack was still swinging open, as the driver had left it when he made his gruesome discovery, and there was sufficient light in the street so that Nick could see at once that there was indeed a dead man inside the hack.

Buck and Patsy, and even stolid Joseph had followed the detective into the street, and now they stood close be-

hind him as he gazed into the conveyance—and what they all saw at the same moment was this:

Leaning back in one corner of the hack was the still figure of a young man, and there was a bullet-hole, plainly to be seen, just above his right temple.

There was sufficient light in the street for them to take all this in at a glance—and also for the detective to realize that the victim of that bullet was quite dead; and he had not the slightest doubt that the victim was Vernon Harcourt."

"Stand back for a moment," he said to the others; and then he leaned forward into the hack for a closer inspection.

After a moment he withdrew his head, and softly closed the door again; then he turned to the driver.

"What is your name?" he asked, not unkindly, for the man was trembling from the shock he had received when he made the terrible discovery.

"Tim McGrath, sir," was the reply.

"Where did you pick up this fare, Timothy?" continued the detective. "Where, and when?"

"He took me hack, sir, in front of the Hotel Mammoth, at half past six, sir. I couldn't say whether he came out of that hotel or not, sir, but it is me opinion that he did that."

"Very well. That was an hour and a half ago. Where have you been since that time?"

"Well, sir, when he took me back, he said to me, says he, 'Are ye after knowin' a mansion in the city that is somewhere on upper Fifth Avenue, that is called the Sheldon Gunnison house?' 'I do,' says I. 'Take me there,' says he. 'I will,' says I."

"Well, and what then?"

"I drove him straight there, sir, and he got out and went to the door, where he rang the bell. I stayed on me box on the hack."

"Yes. Well?"

"When he rang the bell somebody came to the door of the house. I couldn't see who it was from where I sat; but they talked together at the door for a long time, and then the fare stepped inside the door, and it was closed after him."

"Go on. What next?"

"I think it must have been all of twenty minutes before he come out again, and he made straight for me hack and got inside without saying a word to me. I expected him to give me some directions as to where to drive then, but he never said a divil of a word, and I began to think that he was waiting for somebody else to come out of the house and ride with him. But when the silence continued for about two minutes, I got down and axed him where he wanted to go.

"You'd have thought he was asleep, sir, so you would. He started when I spoke to him, just as if he had been asleep, and he said to me in a half-dazed sort of fashion:

"'What did you say?' he says.

"'I axed you where you wished to go to now?' I answered him.

"'Do you know where Nick Carter lives?' says he. 'I do,' says I. 'Take me there,' says he. 'I will,' says I; and wid that I climbs on me box again, picks up the lines, and drives him here, sir."

"Go on," said the detective.

"Well, sir, when I pulled up at the door, I sat still on me box waiting for him to get down, but divil a bit did he do it, sir, and I got tired of waiting; so after a bit I gets down and opens the door, and I says to him:

"'Here we are, sir. This is Nick Carter's house.'

"Sure, sir, he never made the sign of an answer, and then I looks at him closer, thinkin' that maybe he has dropped asleep, and then I sees the blood on his face and the hole in his head, and that his eyes were open and staring, and then I most faints away—and then I ran for your door, sir, and sure you know the rest."

Already there was a crowd collecting about the locality, and Nick sent Joseph into the house for his hat, while he said to the driver:

"I will get on the box with you. We won't do any more talking here. I want you to drive directly to the police-station. Thank you, Joseph."

The distance was not great to the station-house, and they were soon there; and then, having placed a policeman on guard over the hack until the coroner or his assistant should arrive, the detective took the driver into the station-house with him, and directly to the private room of the captain.

The captain of the precinct was quickly made acquainted with what had happened—although Nick did not think it necessary as yet to relate more than the driver knew about the incident, and then leaving the driver waiting in the room, Nick and the captain went outside together, and once more made a cursory examination of things inside the hack.

There was no weapon inside the hack; there were no powder marks on the face of the corpse, as would have been the case had he killed himself; the body itself they did not disturb—it was best not to do that until the arrival of the coroner.

When the two returned to the captain's room, the latter nodded to Nick, to indicate that he wished him to do the questioning; and Nick began:

"Now, Timothy," he said, "it is necessary that you should tell us all about this affair."

"Sure, sir. I have already told you all that I know about it. I have no more idea than you have who the man is, if that is what you mean, sir."

"Nevertheless I think you will discover that you know more than you think you do about it. Don't misunderstand me; I don't mean that you are purposely keeping

anything back, or that you know more than you should know. But I want you to reply to my questions clearly and concisely."

"Sure, I'll do that same, sir."

"Did your fare tell you who he wished to see at that house where you took him?"

"No, sir; he just asked for the house, as I have told you."

"You say that he stood at the door of that house some time after the door was opened, presumably by a servant, before he went inside?"

"Yes, sir; quite a spell."

"And you stated that he was inside the house about twenty minutes?"

"I should think that it was about that, yes, sir."

"Also that when he came out he seemed dazed about something?"

"Well, sir, he acted queer. I didn't notice it at the time, maybe; but he got into the old hack and sat there so long without saying a word, that it surprised me; and then I got down and went to the door and axed him where he wanted to go next, as I told you."

"Yes."

"That is about all, sir."

"Did nobody follow him out of the house?"

"No, sir."

"Did anybody come out of that house while you sat there, waiting for him to speak to you, and to tell you where to go?"

"Yes, sir; somebody did that same."

"Tell me about that, if you please."

"It was that which made me get down and ask him where he wanted to go. I told you that I thought at first that he was waiting for somebody to come out of the house to drive away with him, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, when after a little a man did come out and walk away without so much as glancing at us, I changed my mind about that, and so I got down and axed him the question."

"I see; and it was then that he told you to drive to my house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, during the drive from the Commission mansion to my door, about where were you when you heard the sound of a pistol-shot?"

"Eh? A pistol-shot?"

"Yes. Where were you when you heard the sound of a shot?"

"Sure, sir; it wasn't one shot I heard—but several of them; a whole volley of them," was the astonishing reply.

CHAPTER VII.

A WOMAN DISGUISED AS A MAN.

"Wait a moment," said the detective. "What is that you are telling me? That you heard a whole volley of shots shortly after you drove away from the front of that house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me where that happened."

"Well, sir, you know as well as I do that one side of Fifth Avenue along there is Central Park."

"Yes."

"We were down a little this side of the Seventy-second Street entrance to the park when I heard the shots. I don't remember just what street it was that we were nearest at the time."

"Where did the shots come from?"

"Over in the park—just where there are bushes that grow quite close to the wall."

"And there were several of them?"

"Yes; six or eight, I think."

"What did you think about those shots when you heard them?"

"Well, sir, my idea was that somebody was having a row over the wall inside the park and that bullets were flying rather promiscuous like, and that the best thing that Tim McGrath could do was to get out of that region as quickly as possible."

"So you whipped up your horse, did you?"

"I did that."

"Were you conscious that any of the bullets came your way?"

"Sure it was my idea that they were all coming my way. I think that is the way you are likely to feel, isn't it, when you are too close to a row of that sort?"

"Possibly it is."

"And besides, sir, if there was a row—and that is what I thought it was—I didn't want to be a witness. I got away as fast as my horse could travel for several blocks, and then, as I heard nothing more, I slowed down again."

"And came directly here?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had no idea, I suppose, that one of the bullets from that volley you had heard entered through the open window of your hack?"

"Sure not, sir."

"Why didn't you tell me about those shots, when I asked you some questions over in the street in front of my house?"

"I had clean forgot all about them, sir."

"Until now?"

"Yes, sir, until you axed me about them."

"What was your idea about those shots, relative to the number of weapons that were used?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

"How many pistols should you think were fired, at the time you heard the shots?"

"Three or four, or half a dozen, sir, I should think. I don't know, really, any more about it than you do. I was scared. I didn't want to get one of them bullets into me or through me horse, you see."

"Yes. I can understand that all right. Now, take your mind back to the man who came out of the Gunnison mansion, while your hack was standing in front of it. Did you notice that man particularly?"

"No, sir. I just noticed that it was a man; that was all. When he came out of the door I expected that he was going to get inside the hack with my fare—but he didn't."

"Which way did he go when he came out?"

"He turned down the street and walked very fast."

"Which way were you facing while you waited in front of the house?"

"Up-town."

"So when you started away you had to turn about, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"After you had turned around and started down-town again, did you drive rapidly or slowly?"

"Well, I didn't drive fast. I had made up me mind to charge me fare by the hour."

"Therefore, you were not in a hurry. Now, did you see that man again—the one who came out of the Gunnison mansion?"

"If I did, I did not notice him, sir."

"So you are not sure whether you saw him again or not, eh?"

"I don't think I did see him again, sir. I am reasonably sure that I did not."

"Did you think about him at all?"

"No. I forgot all about him. I had no reason to remember him."

"That is quite true; but don't you think if you *had* seen him, you would have noticed him, and recalled the fact that it was the same man whom you had seen come out of that house?"

"Very likely."

"How was that man dressed?"

"I don't know, more than that he had a soft hat pulled down over his eyes, rather, and that he wore a top-coat."

"Was he tall or short, if you remember?"

"He was a tall man; I remember that."

"Light or dark?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did he walk with a stoop or straight, like a soldier?"

"I should say that he was straight and tall, sir."

"You are sure that you did not notice him again after he came down the steps of the house and turned southward?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear any noise from inside your hack, during or after the shooting?"

"No, sir."

"And when you got to my house you had forgotten all about the shooting?"

"I had, sir. Hack-drivers hear a good many things, and nothing makes much impression on one of us, sir."

"I can understand that."

"You see, sir, since we got so many Sicilian dagoes in the country, they're always fighting and quarreling among themselves, and shooting, too. I happened to know that there was a lot of them working just above there, and if I thought anything about the shooting at all, it was to suppose it was some of them having an argument."

"You did not hear any other pistol-shots while you were on your way down-town, did you?"

"No, sir."

Nick turned to the captain of the precinct.

"What do you think about it, captain?" he asked.

"Why, Nick, it looks to me as if a stray bullet from that mêlée the driver heard, wandered into the hack and killed the passenger. Isn't that the way it strikes you?"

"It is perhaps a natural inference," mused the detective, in reply, "but all the same I think it looks more like a deliberate murder."

"I don't see how you can make that out, Nick."

"Well, I could not, captain, if it did not happen that I know more about this case than appears on the surface. I will tell you all about it presently. In the meantime I will say that from your standpoint, with what you know about it now, it does look like the work of a stray bullet. But it will be an easy matter to settle that point very soon."

"How will you do that?"

"When the coroner gets here and we have removed the body from the hack and made our examination of it, we will have this driver take us to the place where we heard the shots."

"What's the good of that? There won't be likely to be anybody there now."

"No; but they will have left some evidence of their presence there, don't you think?"

"That's so, of course."

"My present belief—and I have a reason for it which you shall presently know—is that there was only one man in the park at the time the shots were fired; that he fired all the shots himself, purposely to give the impression of a row, and to create the idea that it was a stray bullet that did the killing."

"Do you mean the man whom the driver saw come out of that house?"

"Yes."

"Then of course you have a special reason for that idea."

"Certainly. I was expecting the victim of that shot at my house, at the time he arrived. Notwithstanding the fact that he was dead, he arrived on time."

"Then you already know who he is—or was?"

"I already know who *she* was."

"Great Scott! You don't mean to say that that corpse in the hack is the body of a woman, do you?"

"Yes. I had reasons for suspecting it before—I had reasons for suspecting that my expected caller was a woman disguised as a man, and when I went to the hack in the first instance, while it was in front of my door, I made sure. I did not call your attention to the fact just now, because there was no necessity at the moment."

"Well, here is the coroner now. We will soon get at the facts, I suppose. You want this man—the driver—detained, don't you?"

"I don't want him arrested, if that is what you mean; but I do want him to remain with us until I give him leave to depart."

"You hear that, driver?"

"Yes, sir."

"We shall want you to take us to the park presently," said Nick. "Now, coroner, if you will give us your gracious permission, we will bring the body into the station-house. I suppose you have looked inside the hack already, haven't you?"

"Yes. Say, Carter, it's a woman. Did you know that?"

"Yes."

"What else do you know about it?"

"For the present, only the fact that the bullet that killed her came from across Central Park, inside the park, not very far from this side of the Seventy-second Street entrance, on Fifth Avenue."

By the coroner's directions the body was taken from the hack by two policemen and brought into the station-house, where it was laid upon a table under the lights.

Nick lost no time in removing a small, dark, false mustache which had been adjusted with such skill that it looked very natural indeed. The hair had been cropped short and was arranged as a man would wear it, and the entire dress was masculine throughout; and not only that, but it was evident that the wearer had been so long accustomed to masculine garb that it was worn very naturally.

"A fine-looking man, even in death."

"The bullet over the temple must have caused instant death," said the coroner. "She was a young woman, Carter, and properly dressed she would have been handsome, eh?"

"Decidedly so."

"What do you find in the pockets? Anything in the way of identification?"

"Nothing, coroner. There isn't so much as a card or a scrap of paper on the body. It is rather singular, too. One would have supposed that she would have carried something of the sort. But here, coroner, is rather a remarkable circumstance to which I will call your attention. Do you see these bruises on her wrists? They look as if somebody had held her forcibly by both arms very recently, don't they?"

"They do, for a fact, Nick. They do, for a fact," replied the coroner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATAL SHOT FROM AMBUSH.

It was a strange circumstance that there was absolutely nothing in the pockets of the clothing worn by the corpse. They were as empty as when they were made.

There was no jewelry, no watch, no trinkets of any kind, not a scrap of paper or a card, not even a pencil or a knife; and there was nothing about the appearance of the body which called for comment of any kind, save the bruises on the flesh of the wrists to which the detective had already called the attention of the coroner.

As soon as the examination was finished, Nick called the captain and the coroner into the private room; and then he told them something about the knowledge that had already come to him about Vernon Harcourt; for he could not doubt that it was the body of the writer of the letter he had received that was in the back room of the station-house.

"The theory—if there is any theory at all—is this," he said to them. "This girl was on her way to see me this evening, having already written me the letter, as you now know. My idea is that she intended to tell me her whole story, including that part of it which necessitated her disguise as a young man. I suppose that was adopted in order to facilitate her in her search for the two Chesters."

"Well?" asked the coroner.

"My idea is that for some reason which does not now appear, she suddenly determined to go to that house on upper Fifth Avenue, where Godfrey Chester is supposed to be living; she evidently wished to have an interview with him before she came to see me. Anyhow, she went there."

"There isn't any doubt of that."

"According to the driver, she held some parley at the door before she was admitted. That parley was evidently

long enough for the man who lives there to know who it was that was at his door, and when he had prepared for her, he had her admitted. Now it seems to me that as soon as she passed the threshold, she was seized and held."

"You judge that by the marks on the wrist, I suppose?"

"Yes. She was evidently seized and held; her arms were drawn behind her, and somebody not only searched her pockets, but removed therefrom everything that they contained—after which she was hustled out of the house, to return to her hack as she pleased."

"But," said the coroner, "I don't see how anybody would dare to take such high-handed proceedings as that, Carter, and then set her free. What was to prevent her from driving direct to the nearest station-house, and making a report of the occurrence?"

The detective laughed aloud.

"Who at the station-house would have believed such a story?" he asked.

"I guess you are right about that," admitted the coroner. "I had not thought about that, in all its bearings."

"Think for a moment, coroner. If she had gone to the station-house with such a story as that—to the effect that she had been held up and robbed of everything that she possessed, while she was inside that two million dollar mansion—that she had been robbed by a man who is supposed to be almost a billionaire, and then turned adrift—she would have been arrested at once and sent to Bellevue for examination as to her sanity. Furthermore, she was a woman in disguise, and she could not afford to go to the station-house and report, with the certainty staring her in the face that her secret would be discovered."

"Again you are right, Carter."

"And still more, the man who robbed her and deprived her of everything she had about her which would serve for identification did not intend that she should go very far away from his house after she left it."

"Do you mean that he had already determined to kill her—and that she was followed out of the house, and deliberately shot——"

"I mean just that. The fact that the man left the house a few minutes after she did so is not proof of that, but it is circumstantial evidence of it."

"I suppose so; yes."

"There isn't any doubt in my mind that she had several papers and documents in her possession when she entered the Garrison mansion."

"Why?"

"She was on her way to see me, remember. She had to establish her identity with me in order to have me take her case, and she was doubtless prepared to do so."

"That's true."

"She must also have had money, and a watch, and other jewelry. Everything that she possessed that would lead to her identification she was deprived of."

"But, Carter, all this presupposes that the man who robbed her had already, before she left the house, determined to follow her and kill her."

"Yes."

"Doesn't it seem rather preposterous that he would suppose that he could shoot her dead from somewhere along the roadside—shoot her through the window of the hack while that vehicle was in motion and kill her?"

"I don't think so. Not for a so-called dead shot. I could do it, and there is no reason, since what we have seen, to suppose that her murderer was not as good a marksman as I am."

"Well, what do you propose to do now, Carter?"

"I will ask you to direct that the body be sent to the morgue and held there for identification for a time. I do that in order to throw the murderer off his guard. He has taken so much trouble to conceal her identity that I don't want him to discover at once that it is already known."

"All right."

"And then, after you have given the proper directions, the captain and I are going to that place in the park from which the shots were fired. Would you like to accompany us?"

"I certainly should."

"You don't mind riding in that hack, I suppose?"

"Not at all."

"Come, then."

The driver was called, and in a few moments they were driving rapidly up-town toward the place from whence the sound of the many shots had proceeded.

When the hack drew up at the curb, Nick was the first to descend from it, and he had the very over the wall, first directing the driver to point out to him as certainly as he could the exact spot from which the sound of the shots had come.

"How are you going to see anything, Carter?" asked the coroner. "It is dark in there."

By way of reply the detective produced his electric

flash-light, and having followed him across the wall, the two men stood a little to one side while he made his examination.

First he searched along the wall just inside it, but there he found no traces.

"I thought it possible," he explained, "that the murderer might have jumped over the wall somewhere along here, but I find that he did not. His natural course would have been to enter the park at the Seventy-second Street entrance and to have come down to this place from there. Now, stand where you are, please, until I look about me a bit."

He went forward very slowly with his light toward the spot that the driver had indicated—a mass of shrubbery that came near to the wall in one spot there.

Here he found that the ground was soft and yielding, and he had no difficulty in presently discovering plain traces of footmarks.

There was one bare spot, utterly devoid of grass, where there was the mark of a right shoe very plainly imprinted, for the sole and heel had sunk deeply into the soft soil.

"Here is where I shall resort to an old and almost worn-out method," he said; and he called to the driver.

"Tim," he said, "do you happen to know where you can find a drug-store around here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get on your box and go to it as quickly as you can. Get me a couple of pounds of plaster of Paris and a half-pint flask of plain water. Hurry back here."

"Yes, sir."

When he was gone the detective continued his investigation; but now he did it silently, while the others waited impatiently for him to announce what he was discovering; for he was plainly interested in what he found.

But he was still busily engaged when Timothy returned with the plaster and the water, and he quickly made a paste, which he poured into the imprint on the soft earth which has already been described. Then he turned to the captain and the coroner.

"While we are waiting for that plaster to harden, shall I tell you what I have discovered here?" he asked them.

"Yes. Please do so," was the reply from both.

"I will tell you in the form of a narrative, then."

"Go ahead, Carter," said the coroner impatiently.

"A man who wears very neat and well-made shoes came into the park somewhere above here, presumably at the entrance at Seventy-second Street; he came down along the road until he was almost here, when he left it and approached this wall; he was running, for he had no time to spare; I am of the opinion that he barely arrived here in time, and he must have been out of breath almost when he did so.

"He stopped suddenly at the edge of those bushes—so suddenly that he slipped a little on one foot; he had a five-shot, thirty-eight caliber pistol in his grasp, and——"

"How do you know that, Carter?"

"Don't interrupt. You will soon know."

"All right. Excuse me."

"He fired all five of the cartridges that the weapon contained. Probably he sent the first shot or two into the air, in order to attract the attention of the passenger in the hack that was passing along the avenue at that moment. Coroner, if you were riding past here in a hack, and you heard a shot or two from a pistol over here in these bushes, what would be your first impulse?"

"To duck my head, I suppose; eh?"

"No; it would be to look out at the window of the hack in which you were riding, to see where the shots came from, if you could, at any rate, to find out what was happening."

"I don't know but that is right."

"That would be the first impulse. The first impulse of any man or person is always curiosity."

"Sure."

"The man who was here with the gun knew that, and he banked upon it—calculated upon it, you know."

"Yes."

"So he fired a shot or two into the air to attract the attention of the person in the hack and made her look out at the window."

"It is evident that he succeeded, anyhow."

"Yes. That is very evident. At the sound of the shots she started forward—and the third shot struck her in the head above the temple and killed her, after which she fell back again upon the cushions of the carriage. See?"

"Yes."

"Now, having done that, and accomplished what he came here to do, the man carried out the rest of his original purpose, which was to give the impression of a stray bullet, when the driver should have reported all that he knew; so he fired the remaining shots in his revolver into the air, and knowing that he had killed the woman, and that the driver of the hack had no idea that he had done so, he turned on his heel and ran as fast as he could, in

order to escape observation. But that is not all; he did more than that."

"What more, Carter?"

"I will tell you."

CHAPTER IX.

PUTTING TWO AND TWO TOGETHER.

"I don't suppose, coroner," the detective continued after a short pause, "that you have ever had much experience with gun-fighters, have you? I mean the sort of gun-fighters we used to have in the West, and some of whom are there still?"

"I never had any at all."

"You have heard that they are wonderful marksmen, haven't you?"

"Yes. I suppose they are—or were."

"Now, let me tell you one peculiarity about gun-fighters."

"All right. What is it?"

"They can shoot with wonderful rapidity and with remarkable accuracy, notwithstanding the speed with which they fire. And once a gun they are using is emptied, the impulse—indeed, a part of the very act of firing, is to break the gun and throw out the shells of the cartridges that have been used. This is done in order to reload as quickly as possible. That is the peculiarity I referred to."

"Well, what of it?"

"The man who came down to this spot, intending to shoot and kill the girl who was riding in that hack, intended to leave no trace behind him of what he had done. But he forgot his impulses and his habits—that is, he forgot to calculate upon them."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that after he had fired the five shots that his gun held, he broke the gun and threw out the shells before he remembered what he was doing. He had fired them so rapidly that he followed an old impulse to free his gun as quickly as possible after he had used it. Do you understand now?"

"Yes."

"And there wasn't time to stop to gather up those shells, even if it had been light enough at the time for him to have found them. I can fancy that he swore to himself about it, but that he also realized that he must get away from this spot as quickly as possible, for neighboring policemen were apt to have heard the shots and to make some sort of investigation."

"Yes."

"So he skipped, leaving the shells on the ground here. It may be that he intends now to return for them in the morning. Anyhow, we will leave them here for him to find if he does so."

"But what do you make of all that, Carter?"

"Merely corroborative evidence, that is all."

"Corroborative of what?"

"Of the fact that he is a Western man who has been a gun-fighter, who is a dead shot under any conditions—who could probably drive a nail with every bullet, at the distance from here to the middle of the avenue, and that he is used to gun-play."

"But how does that help you?"

"It is, as I have said, merely corroborative."

"Again—of what?"

"The man who lives in that house where the girl called and where she was robbed of everything she had in her pockets—the man who lives there and calls himself a billionaire, is a Western man; that is, he has lived eighteen years in the West, to my certain knowledge."

"Oh! I see."

"He lived for a long time on a ranch in Arizona. He has since been in the Klondike, where he found his fortune. He is a gun-fighter."

The coroner shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"It is all a very pretty theory indeed," he said, "but it strikes me all the same as being rather far-fetched. It doesn't look reasonable that a man in his position in life would in the first place hold up a girl who called upon him at his own house and while one of his servants held her—for that is what you imply—rob her of everything that she possessed.

"It doesn't look reasonable," he continued, "that if he did do such a thing, he would turn her loose again at once, to do as she pleased, to report what he had done, and all that.

"It looks to me still more unreasonable that he would follow her out of the house afterward, leap the fence into the park, or enter through the gateway, as you please, and having concealed himself in some bushes, would shoot her in cold blood, as you say this fellow has done. To me it looks mighty unreasonable."

"I grant you that, on the face of it."

"Well, what is there behind the face of it?"

"There is evidence in my possession—not very satisfy-

ing evidence so far, but it is evidence—that the man who lives in the Gunnison mansion is not the man he pretends to be; that he has possessed himself of what he has now by fraud and theft and murder, and that the girl he has killed was in a position to betray him possibly."

"Well, even so——"

"Possibly among the papers he took from her, there at his house, there were some not only to establish her identity, but also to prove that he was himself a fraud."

"Well, even so, having deprived her of them, what had he to fear after that?"

"He had her to fear. She may have had other papers. I think he found it necessary to get her out of the way—and he took the quickest course to accomplish it."

"Well, if that was his intention, and he did what you say, he certainly took an expeditious course all right. But it looks to me rather far-fetched, all the same."

"I suppose it was."

"May I ask what you intend to do now, Carter? Is it your idea, on the evidence you have so far obtained, to go to his house and arrest him?"

The captain had remained silent all this time, an interested listener; and now the detective turned to him.

"What do you say to that, captain?" he asked.

"Well," the captain replied, "all that I have got to say about it is that judging from all I have heard you say, I imagine you have got some other facts up your sleeve, Nick, that we have not been told about. I think if you decide to go to the house and arrest the man you will probably know exactly what you are doing. That has been my experience with you."

"I think, anyhow, we will leave here," replied the detective. "I don't think, captain, that I will attempt any arrests until I know a little more about it than I do now—or at least until I have seen Chick."

"Chick! What has he got to do with it?"

"He happens to be dining at that house to-night."

"What! With the very man you suspect of this murder?"

"Yes."

"Dining there! How in the world——"

"Oh, I had no previous knowledge of his intention to commit this murder. You must not give me credit for anything supernatural, you know."

"But how does it happen that Chick is there to-night?"

"Isidore Chester—the man who lives there and whom I suspect of this crime we are investigating—sent me a letter asking me to dine with him to-night at eight o'clock, and intimating that he had a case he wished me to take. I had already received two other letters—one from the murdered girl and the other from an old miner friend of mine—about this same man. It looked to me like two cases in one, so I sent Chick there in my place."

"Gee, Nick!" exclaimed the captain, "you are the only man I have ever known who could really do the act of being literally in two places at once. You can do that."

"I can come pretty near it, with Chick's aid; that's right."

"Who is the miner friend? Is he from the Klondike, too?"

"Yes."

They had returned to the hack while they were talking and were already driving rapidly down-town; and a silence fell upon them after that, for all were thinking over the strange occurrences of the evening; and there was no more conversation until the hack drew up in front of the Hotel Mammoth, where they all got down.

"I'll hold the inquest at my office to-morrow afternoon, at two o'clock, Carter," said the coroner, as they were about to part.

"All right," replied the detective. "I will try to be ready for you at that time, and I think I will be. If not, I will have to ask you to postpone it. Good night, coroner."

"Are you going in here, Nick?" asked the captain.

"Yes. I have an idea that the girl was stopping here. It won't take long to find out. I will call you up on the telephone in the morning, captain."

"All right. I'll let this fellow drive me back to the station-house."

"Very good, sir. Timothy, I want you to take a day off to-morrow, and come to my house at noon. Here is money enough to pay you for all your troubles. Take it and keep a still tongue in your head about what you have heard and seen to-night."

"I will that, sir."

Nick left them and went straight into the hotel, where at the desk he found a clerk whom he knew, and he asked:

"I want to know if you have anybody stopping here by the name of Vernon Harcourt."

"Yes. We had such a person," was the reply. "A young chap—rather eccentric looking, but very nice. He has gone. Left this evening, Mr. Carter."

"Eh? This evening. How is that? Tell me about it, please."

"All I know about it is that about eight o'clock a messenger came here from Mr. Harcourt, bringing his card and the key to his room and money to pay his bill; and also a receipt we had given Harcourt for some money he had in the safe. The messenger drew the money, went to Harcourt's room and packed his stuff, and took it away."

"And you permitted him to do it, eh?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"How did you know that the messenger came from Harcourt?"

"Why, I have told you. He had a card with writing on the back of it, directing us to turn the property over to him; he had the key to the room; he had that receipt for the money——"

"And you gave him everything?"

"Certainly. What is wrong?"

"I'll tell you presently. What sort of looking messenger was it who came here?"

"A man who looked as if he might be somebody's butler."

"Exactly. I guess that is what he was."

"Isn't it all right, Mr. Carter? Did I do wrong in letting him have the money and the things?"

"You certainly should not have done it without better proof. I don't want to frighten you, and I don't want even to tell what I shall tell you; but that young Harcourt was first robbed and then murdered this evening, and the people—or rather the man who sent that messenger here for his money and baggage was the man who robbed and then killed *her*."

"*Her!* What do you mean by that?"

"You just now said that Harcourt was effeminate looking. Harcourt was a young woman in disguise."

"The devil you say!"

"It is true."

"And has been murdered? Good Heaven! I suppose I will get into a heap of trouble about this now. It is the last time that I will take anybody's word for anything."

"I think I can save you from unnecessary trouble. But I am sorry that the baggage has been taken away, for I expected to find things there which would have assisted me very much indeed. As it is, I will have to get on without them. All the same, I wish you would send me to the room she occupied. I would like to look around it a little."

"I'll go up with you, Mr. Carter."

CHAPTER X.

THE HUMAN TARGET.

The visit to the room formerly occupied by Vernon Harcourt was useless, however, for already it had been cleaned and prepared for the arrival of another guest; but while the detective was descending to the ground floor again with the clerk, he asked him:

"How long a time has Vernon Harcourt been a guest here?"

"Just a week to-day, Mr. Carter. I wish you would tell me what you think I ought to do about what you have just told me. Ought I to report what you have said to the management?"

"No; it isn't necessary. You may as well keep silent about it, at least until you hear from me again; after that, if it is necessary to take any further steps in the matter, I will tell you what to do."

The clerk thanked him and he left the hotel at once, going directly to his own home, where he confidently expected to find Buck Hawkins still awaiting him.

It will be remembered that it was eight o'clock in the evening when he left his own house to drive to the police-station with the body of the murdered young woman; it was now eleven.

He had said nothing to Hawkins about remaining until he returned; but their conversation was not finished at the time, and he hoped that Patsy would have kept the miner.

He was disappointed, however, for Buck had gone.

"He left the house about half an hour after you did," Patsy told him. "Before he went out he asked me some questions about the location of the Gunnison mansion, so I shouldn't wonder if he has gone up there to pay his respects to the man he is after."

Nick was startled.

"I hope he has not done that," he said. "Did he say that he was going there?"

"No; but he wanted particularly to know how to find the house, so I have an idea that he intended at least to have a look at it from the outside."

"It would be just like him to go directly there to-night, and perhaps to spoil something that would be just as bad, get himself into a lot of trouble by killing Chos-

ter, or maiming him for life. However, Chick was there, probably. By the way, Chick has not returned, has he, Patsy?"

"No."

"Nor telephoned?"

"I have not heard from him at all."

"Have you remained at home all the time since I went out?"

"Yes."

"I don't suppose you are at all curious about what has happened since I went out, are you, my lad?" the detective asked, with a smile.

"To tell the truth, I am. But I know you will tell me when you get ready."

Thereupon the detective related all that had happened since his departure from the house. Nick went to his study after that and waited patiently for an hour for Chick's return, for the affairs of the case had developed so rapidly since the departure of his first assistant for the home of Godfrey Chester, that there was no necessity now of adhering to the original idea about working out two cases.

He confessed to himself that he was intensely curious to know what Chick would have to report, and he had no doubt that there would be enough in it, which added to what he already knew, to make logical the immediate arrest of the billionaire.

But when at midnight and after, Chick had not appeared, Nick became really anxious, and after waiting another half-hour, he suddenly left his chair, determined to call Danny around with the Peerless car and to visit at least the outside of the Fifth Avenue mansion.

He regretted now that he had not thought to ask Buck Hawkins where he was stopping, for had he known where to find the miner, he would have gone after him at once.

In fact, Nick was uneasy all around. So much had happened since the receipt of those letters.

It did not take Danny long to get the automobile around to the front door, and the detective was soon hurrying up the avenue.

When they arrived in front of the Gunnison mansion, the house was as dark and silent, apparently, as a tomb, and they rode on past it to the next corner, where Nick stopped the machine and got out.

"Wait here for me, Danny," he said; and then he walked slowly back along the avenue until he was again directly in front of the mansion.

"I can't get over the feeling," he mused to himself, "that something has happened or is happening inside that house, that I ought to know about. The question is, what is it? Shall I ring the bell and inquire for the owner, or shall I attempt to enter the house without ringing the bell?"

While he was turning the question over in his mind, he slowly ascended the steps, nor did he pause until he stood under the arch of the door.

Those who are familiar with Nick Carter's adventures know that he always carried with him a small invention of his own which he called a picklock, with which he could master almost any lock that is made.

He took that instrument from his pocket now and gently applied it to the latch-lock of the door.

He was not surprised to find that it yielded at once to his efforts; nor was he surprised when he found that another lock under that one had been shot into place, thus denoting that the mansion had been locked for the night.

But that did not deter him from his decision to enter the place now. He had gone thus far, and he was determined to proceed to the end.

Withdrawing the picklock from the latch-lock, he applied it to the lower one, and soon shot the bolt of it back; then again attacking the lesser lock, he pushed the door gently open, until it was caught and held by a chain-bolt that was on the inside, and which permitted the door to swing open only about three inches.

Steel nippers quickly produced from another pocket soon subdued the chain so that the two now useless ends of it dropped out of the way, and he pushed the door gently open and entered; but he stopped to listen as he did so, wondering if he would hear anywhere in the house the sound of a burglar-alarm.

But he heard nothing of the kind, and he passed on through the doorway, closing and latching the door behind him.

A dim light burned in the lower hall—no doubt it was just as the butler had left it when he retired; and Nick smiled when he thought that that same butler was doubtless the man who had gone to the hotel with Vernon Harcourt's card, and taken possession of the money and baggage that had been left there.

For a moment he did not know which way he would attempt to make his investigation; but while he stood there in the hallway thinking, a startling thing happened to decide him.

It was nothing less than a pistol-shot which rang out dully, seeming to come in a muffled sort of way from somewhere toward the top of the great house.

"That's strange," he thought, as he started toward the stairs. "It certainly was a pistol-shot."

He kept in the shadow as best he could, clinging close to the wall along the wide stairway; but he neither heard nor saw anything to suggest that the shot had been heard by any one save himself, so presently he went on with more confidence.

At the first landing he found himself in an immense saloonlike corridor which extended the entire length of the building; the second flight of stairs was at the rear; and here, also, there was a light burning to illuminate his way.

As he went forward he stopped frequently to listen, but he heard no sound whatever until he arrived at the top of the third flight of stairs; and then, just as he stepped out upon the landing, a second pistol-shot rang out, quite close to him, and it was instantly followed by a loud laugh.

There was a gas-jet burning here quite brightly. The light of it enabled the detective to see exactly where he was.

He was in a wide hall at the top of the house, and directly before him was a door which he believed opened upon the billiard-room of the house.

The detective's first act was to extinguish the light, and then, very softly indeed, he tried the door.

It yielded to his touch and noiselessly, so that he was enabled to push the door gently ajar until he could peer through the opening beyond it—and then he almost uttered an exclamation of surprise at what he saw.

He found that he was indeed looking into the billiard-room of the house, as he had suspected would be the case; but that also it had been fitted as a gymnasium and a shooting-gallery by the man who built it.

But that was not what astonished the detective: it was the scene that was being enacted there.

The shooting-gallery had been built along the side of the large room, with the targets arranged at the end farthest from the point where Nick was standing.

Near to where Nick was—perhaps twenty feet from him—stood the owner of the house, presumably Godfrey Chester, or at least the man who called himself by that name.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his back was toward the detective, and he was standing with a revolver in his right hand, and laughing in a low, satisfied tone at something he had just done.

At the opposite end of the room, standing up against the targets, with his arms extended like a cross at either side of him, hatless and coatless, with blood trickling down each side of his face and with blood-stains also showing upon his extended hands, was Buck Hawkins.

He was firmly fastened there where he stood, too.

A slip-noose had been drawn around each of his wrists and carried to rings in the target-board, where the rope was fastened so that he could not take down his hands.

His ankles were bound tightly together, and ropes led each way from them to fastenings on either side; another rope was passed around his waist and also made fast in the same manner, so that in fact he was held there so firmly that if he had been rendered unconscious he would still have retained his position.

It was instantly evident to the detective that this strange billionaire, as he styled himself, was amusing himself by practising with his pistol, using Buck Hawkins as a target—and that he was highly enjoying himself.

But that was not all that the detective saw when he peered through the opening he had made by pushing the door ajar.

Chick was there also—Chick, who had been made up to represent Nick Carter himself, and who looked at that distance exactly as if he were the detective in person. It was evident, too, that the man with the pistol believed him to be Nick Carter.

And there were three other men present besides those already mentioned.

One of these was evidently the butler of the house, or at least the man who acted in that capacity; the others were men in evening attire, who lolled at one side, on leather-covered couches, smoking, and who seemed to be enjoying themselves hugely.

If ever there was an expression of sullen fury in the eyes of a man, Buck Hawkins had it in his eyes at that moment while the man with the pistol slowly raised his weapon again, and announced:

"Now, Buck, I'll do a little better this time. With this next bullet, I'll pinch off just the last few bits of the flesh from your left ear—from the top of it, mind you. I tell you, Buck, it is something, isn't it, to be a fine shot like

I am? Hey? But it is finer to have such a real nice target to practise on. Do you like it, my bucky boy?"

Just what Buck replied is not printable; but it amused his tormentor immensely, for he laughed immoderately while he slowly raised his weapon to take another shot.

And then, without apparently taking any aim at all, he fired.

Nick could see that Buck Hawkins winced a little, and that he uttered some sort of epithet as he did so—while another spot of blood appeared suddenly at the top of his left ear.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME EXHIBITION SHOOTING.

It was a startling scene for Nick to come upon so strangely, and he could not imagine how it had come about; nor could he understand why it was that Chick was also a prisoner; but he was very glad that he had followed out his impulse to enter the house and search it.

The thing now for him to consider was how he was to get inside of the room without being discovered.

Chester—if the man was Chester—stood with his back toward the detective; but the others were almost facing him; and they were constantly glancing toward the man with the weapon, so that there was danger that if Nick attempted to step inside the room, he would be seen at once.

But he was determined to get inside the room somehow, for he had no doubt that if he permitted that scene to continue to its logical end, it would result in Chick's being used also for a target.

"What do you think of that shot, Carter?" he heard Godfrey Chester call out to Chick; and it startled him for an instant, for it seemed as if the question were addressed to him.

"Rotten," replied Chick calmly, shrugging his shoulders, for although he was bound tightly to the big Morris chair in which he was seated, could still use his arms and shoulders.

"I suppose you think you could do better; eh?" Chester continued, laughing again.

"I know that I could. If you will give me a pistol and free my right hand, I'll show you mighty quick."

"Huh! I've no doubt of that, my friend. But you may as well understand, right now, that you won't get the chance. After we are through with this bucky boy—that is, after I have got tired of scaring him and have sent a bullet through his heart, I intend to stand you up there in his place and practise on you."

Chick made no reply. Indeed there was nothing to say. He seemed to be utterly in the power of the man who amused himself so strangely. Then Chester turned his attention again to Hawkins.

"Buck," he said, "I'll let you select the target this time. Where shall I put the next bullet; eh?"

"If you want to do humanity a real service, you might put it through your own brain—if you happen to have any," drawled Buck, in reply.

"Come, now; that isn't at all bad, Buck. You are getting distinctly humorous. It was awfully good of you to come up here to-night and to give me a chance at you."

"I came to get a chance at you, you whelp of the devil!" rejoined Buck, who liked to talk almost as well as his captor did.

"Oh, I know that. You lost no time in telling me. You will never have another chance, my bucky boy, so make the most of this one. Are you ready now, Buck? I am going to take about an eighth of an inch off the tip of the little finger of your left hand, so hold it still."

Again, without apparent effort, and without taking perceptible aim, he fired and the bullet flew unerringly to its mark; and Nick saw that Buck winced again, in spite of his valiant effort to resist the impulse to do so.

Plainly it was high time that the detective found his way to the inside of that room if he intended to do so at all; and it was evident that he could do nothing to rescue his two friends from their predicament until he was inside the room.

He decided then and there to take a desperate chance, and accordingly he dropped to the floor, flat upon his belly, and then slowly pushed the door open until it was wide enough ajar for him to squirm his body through the opening.

And then he waited a moment to ascertain if the motion of the door was noticed, and as he heard nothing to suggest that it was, he slowly began to make his way forward until he was well across the threshold, and therefore inside the room.

And there he managed to turn his body around a little, in order that he might close the door again after him, for he knew that the instant one of the men at the other end of the room raised his eyes to shut the door would be discovered.

But he succeeded in getting it closed before any discovery could be made; and now he had only to squirm his way along the floor toward one of the billiard-tables, which was not far distant.

He knew that if once he could gain the shelter of that table, he would be protected from view, and that he would not only be enabled to see and hear all that happened, but he would have an opportunity to plan his own attack upon them, which must come before long, if he was to put a stop to the torture of Buck before Chester decided to send a bullet through the miner's heart.

Nick had no doubt whatever that it was the intention of the billionaire to kill both men before he left that room. He was just one of those bloodthirsty individuals who can kill for the very joy of it.

He understood now, also, why the billionaire had written him that note, asking him to dine there and pretending that he had a case on hand for him to take up.

It was plain to Nick's mind that Chester had received advices from the Klondike to the effect that Buck Hawkins had reappeared on the scene, and had started for the States to wreak vengeance upon the man who had wronged him.

There was no doubt that Buck had told one or more of his friends up there that he intended to call upon Nick Carter as soon as he arrived; and now Nick could see plainly that Chester, in sending the note and requesting that he dine with him, had only intended to forestall the arrival of Buck, and that the invitation was only a lure to get the detective into his power.

And Chick, having taken the place of Nick for that evening, had fallen into the trap in his place.

Doubtless he had been fallen upon and overpowered as soon as he arrived in the house, or while he was at the dinner-table; doubtless, also, the arrival of Buck in the city had been watched for and reported to Chester, and as he was likely he had been shadowed from the very moment when he stepped off the train.

So, in that case, it was known when he left the detective's house to go to Chester's; and he had also fallen into the trap that had been so deftly set.

While the detective was turning these things over in his mind, he continued to worm his way along the floor, until presently he arrived under the billiard-table, safely out of the range of vision of Chester's guests, who were undoubtedly men of his own stamp.

It was evident now that Chester had used all the cartridges in his pistol, for he called to the butler to bring him a fresh supply; and as soon as he had reloaded, he said to Buck:

"Wouldn't you like to see a little fancy shooting, bucky boy?"

"Aw, dry up, won't you?" replied Buck. "Shoot if you want to, but spare me the sound of your jaw."

"Spread your fingers apart, bucky boy—the fingers of your right hand. Do as I say, or I will spread them for you with bullets. That's right. Now, are you ready?"

"Go on, curse you!"

"Let me see. Four shots. One between the thumb and first finger, and one between each of the other fingers. That makes four, doesn't it? Sure. *Now!*"

In an instant he threw the weapon down into position, and then more rapidly than one could have counted he fired four times in quick succession.

He was certainly a wonderful marksman, for each of the bullets went exactly to the spot where he had intended it should, and there was a bullet-hole in the board between each of the fingers of Buck's right hand and also between the thumb and finger.

"What do you think of that, Carter?" Chester called out, with one of his chucking laughs.

"Oh, that isn't so bad," replied Chick from his chair. "I wish you would let me try."

"Not this evening. This is a star performance with only one star in the cast. And that reminds me—you ought to have seen another shot I made to-night. It was a beauty."

"Indeed?" replied Chick. "Where was that; or, rather, when was it?"

"Oh, that was just before you came—just before you arrived, to walk into the nice little trap I had set for you."

"What was it?"

"I suppose I might as well tell you as not, for you will never leave this house alive unless you come to a proper agreement with me—and I have no idea you will do that."

"Probably not."

"Then you are as good as dead already."

"All the same I think I am worth a good many dead men yet," said Chick coolly.

"Oh, are you? Well, I have more than half a mind to send a bullet through you now, right where you sit, Carter. *So!*"

He fired the last cartridge that was in the pistol, then

straight at Chick, apparently; and the bullet whizzed past his cheek and buried itself in the back of the frame of the chair; and then while Chester called to his man to reload again for him, he continued:

"I guess I will tell you about that other shot. Carter, did you ever happen to hear of a person named Vernon Harcourt?"

"Named what?" asked Chick quietly.

"Well, perhaps you have not. Maybe she had not had a chance to inform you about her plans as yet, and possibly she had not written to you; but all the same I found a draft of a letter that was for you. I supposed it had been written and sent off to you before this."

"What in the world are you talking about?" asked Chick, as if he did not in the least understand.

"I am talking about a snap shot that I made to-night, which was one of the best, considering the light I had, that I ever made. I think I will tell you about it."

"Go ahead, then. Don't make such a long preamble, please. You get tiresome."

"Oh, do I? Well, the person I have named was a young woman dressed up in man's clothes. She carried off the disguise in very good shape, too. She had an idea that she had some sort of an ax to grind with me, and so she did as bucky boy tried to do—she came here to have it out with me—here in my own house; see?"

"Yes. I see so far."

"Well, she walked into the lion's den that time, don't you see?"

"Into a snake's den, rather," said Buck from his place against the target.

"Oho, Bucky, woke up, eh? I'll attend to your case presently. She walked in here, and I had Tommy and Gumpy grab her and hold her as soon as she was inside the house; and then we went through her pockets and took every solitary thing she had in her possession. All her papers and everything. Nice, wasn't it?"

"It sounds real nice and gentlemanly," said Chick.

"Then we turned her adrift again, and she was so dazed by what had happened that she didn't know what her name was, I reckon. But you see, Carter, she might have made me considerable trouble, and I had no idea of letting her get to you or to one of your assistants—and, by the way, I'm going to get them here, too, one by one. Hear that?"

"I am listening."

"Well, she was so dazed that she got into her hack at the door and sat there, trying, I suppose, to think what to do next. In the meantime I slipped out of the house, and over into the park, and a little later, when she was driving past in the hack, I let off a shot into the air to attract her attention, and to make her look out of the window of the hack; and when she did that, I gave her one of these pills, out of this same gun. She never knew what hit her, Carter—and the driver went on as unconscious of what had happened as if he were in another part of the city. What do you think of that, Carter?"

"Do you mean to say that you killed that girl in cold blood, you brute?" demanded Chick.

"Certainly. Why not? She was in my way. She was the daughter of——"

He stopped there, and as he did so, Nick Carter slowly rose to his feet behind him.

The moment for action had come.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST THROW OUT OF THE BOX.

It was fortunate for Nick, considering the plan he had adopted, that the billiard-table underneath which he had concealed himself was rather close to the spot where Godfrey Chester had been standing during his exhibition of marksmanship.

It was also perhaps fortunate that the attention of the others happened to be centered upon Chick at just the moment when Nick decided to act.

At all events it is certain that not a person in that great room had an idea of his presence until the instant, when having risen suddenly directly behind Chester, he seized him, twisted the revolver from his grasp so that it fell clattering to the floor, and then, with one of the many ju-jutsu holds that the detective knew how to use, he lifted the man from his feet, turned him over backward, and hurled him half-way across the room and against the side wall with a force that almost shook the building, with force sufficient, at least, to knock the breath from his body and to render him totally unconscious.

And it was all done so quickly that the two sporty guests whom Chester had been entertaining, and the butler, had no idea what had happened until it was over and past.

And when they did start to their feet, it was only to find themselves staring into the muzzles of a pair of pistols in the detective's hands, which menaced them so

thoroughly that they were glad to comply with his stern order:

"Hands up, or take the consequences!"

"Glory be, Nick!" called out Buck Hawkins from his uncomfortable position against the target-board. "I knowed you'd show up before long. You wouldn't mind coming over here and cutting these ropes, would you?"

"In just a minute, Buck. Be patient. I'll have you loose presently; but first, you have got to make me a solemn promise, or I won't set you free to-night."

"A promise? What is it, Nick? Heaven knows that I'll promise you anything you ask."

But Nick did not reply at once; instead he crossed the room rapidly to the chair where Chick was seated, but at the same time keeping his guns so that they covered the three men who were now huddled in the corner; and as he drew nearer to them he said:

"I think I may just as well give you fellows one more warning. I don't know who you are, and I don't care. You don't interest me. After I am through here to-night, you may go your several ways without hindrance from me at all; *but I want you to understand, all of you, that the first one who interferes with what I am doing now, gets badly hurt!*"

By this time he was close in front of his assistant, and dropping one hand long enough to carry it to his pocket, he produced a knife which he opened with his teeth, and then, working again with his left hand, he cut the cords which held Chick a prisoner.

The assistant lost no time in leaping to his feet.

"Take some of those ropes that were used on you, and tie Chester so that he can't get loose," the detective ordered him. "When you have done that—well, we'll see what we will do then. But wait a minute. I think it would be well first to search those three over there in the corner to see if they have any weapons about them."

"I know that they have not," replied Chick. "Don't forget that I have been here all the time."

"All right. Go ahead with tying up Godfrey Chester, then."

"I say, Nick," Buck called out again, "aren't you going to set me free? I'm not any too comfortable, old man. That snake over there on the floor has been making a target of me pretty nearly all the evening, with the result that I've got about a dozen little wounds on me. Oh, they ain't serious, Nick, none of them; but they smart all the same."

"They serve you about right, Buck," replied the detective, looking at him sternly.

"Eh? Why is that?"

"Because you had no business to come here at all. You came to my house to see me and practically put your case in my hands, and then the moment my back was turned you take things entirely into your own control, and come here. What has happened to you serves you about in the right way."

"Well, maybe you're right, Nick. Maybe that's so. But you see, you ain't never been laid away on a shelf for two years without knowing anything all that time, as I have. And I want to tell you that I was right anxious to see that there cuss. Say, be a good chap and let me loose, won't you?"

"I told you a moment ago that I would not set you free until you made me a promise, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did; and I replied that I'd promise you anything, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you want me to promise?"

"It isn't that I *want* you to promise; it is that you have *got* to promise."

"Oh, well, all right; let her go. What is it?"

"You are pretty mad at that man over there, aren't you? The one whom Chick is tying up so carefully? Eh?"

"Well, I reckon I am—some. But not so much as I was a little while ago. I ain't got so much against him as I thought I had, before I came here. I ain't got nothin' against him only that target-practise, and I reckon I can stand that, Nick."

"I want you to promise me that if I let you loose now, you will not touch that man, or go near him, or attempt to hurt him or injure him in any way. Will you do that?"

"Cert, Nick. Why not?"

Nick looked at Buck in some surprise and some doubt; and then he asked quietly:

"Isn't that the man who was in the Klondike with you, Buck?"

"Oh, yes; he was up there all right, but he ain't Black Chet, nor Brown Chet either. He ain't either one of them."

"He is not? Who is he, then?"

"He's only a gambler who raised Hail Columbia when I was there—that is, when I first got there. He lit out from there during the very first week I was in it up, see?"

"But what has become of the man you were after? What has become of Godfrey Chester?—and of the other man, his cousin, who called himself Chester Godfrey? But wait a minute until I set you free. There. Now you can answer those questions."

"I reckon you weren't here in time to hear him tell about that, were you?"

"I imagine not. What was it? What did he have to say on the subject?"

"Well, I don't know whether his story is true or not, and I'm afraid we'll never have a chance to prove whether it is or not, but, anyhow, he says that Brown Chet went up into that country, and killed Black Chet and that later he did for Brown Chet himself. And after he had put Chester Godfrey away, who was already posing as his cousin, Godfrey Chester, he gobbled up all the wealth and the name and everything."

"Do you mean to tell me that both of those cousins are dead, Buck? Is that what you are telling me?"

"That is what I am telling you because that is what he told me; and I reckon he wouldn't have had any cause to say it unless it was so. You see he didn't intend that I should ever get out of this room alive. Did you hear him tell about killing that poor girl, Nick?"

"Yes. I heard that."

"I hope you will see to it that he gets his deserts for that, Nick."

"I certainly will. What is his name, since he is not either of the men we supposed he might be?"

"His name is Morgan. He has always been known up there as Bad Morgan. I don't know him by any other name than that. He had a big gambling-joint in Nome. He has run it there for a number of years until he saw a chance to make this ten-strike."

"All right. I'll talk to him a little bit now, for I see he is coming around."

Chick had tied the gambler's hands behind him and seated him in a chair, and now he stood over him while Nick asked his questions.

"I suppose you have heard what Buck Hawkins has just told me, haven't you?" Nick asked.

"I'm not deaf, Mr. Carter," was the surly reply.

"So your name is Morgan, is it?"

"What's my name, since the cat is out of the bag. I might as well own up, I suppose."

"What has become of the man from whom you stole all the wealth you have been enjoying under his name?"

"I suppose you mean Chester, don't you?"

"I suppose I do."

"Well, I can't exactly tell you what has become of him. All that I know is that I shot him and left him for dead about forty miles out of Nome. After that I managed to pass myself off as him, and I did it so well that I concluded to go the whole act; and it would have succeeded, too, only for you."

"I doubt it. Are you sure that Chester is dead?"

"I shot him and left him for dead; that is all I know about it. He deserved it, anyhow. He was as bad as I was. He had murdered his own cousin, the real Godfrey Chester, in order to get his dust, but he did it somewhere down in Arizona."

"I suppose," said Nick slowly, "that you realize, do you not, that you have made a confession here to night which we all heard, to the effect that you deliberately shot and killed that poor girl in the hack—shot her from ambush among the bushes in the park?"

"Oh, yes. I realize it, all right. There isn't any use in trying to skin out of what I have done, Carter. I was always ready to take my medicine when it came to me. If a confession is all you want, you shall have it. I've had my fling, and I'm through. Only I want to say that those men over there have had nothing to do with any of my crimes—and that is all I am going to say."

And so it happened that when the coroner's inquest was held over the body of Vernon Harcourt at two o'clock the following day, it was all made clear how the crime had been committed. Morgan added only one thing to his confession, which was that he had received letters from the girl and was afraid of her. He supposed all the time that she knew her relatives by sight, and therefore that she would betray him. That was why he shot her.

And when Nick asked him about the letter, referring to the conspiracy, he laughed and replied:

"I had heard so much about you, Carter, that I was afraid of you. I thought if I could get you into my house and into my power, I could bring you around to my terms. I made the mistake of measuring you by my own standard. That's all."

THE END.

The next issue of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY No. 554, will contain besides the usual editorial department and about eleven a complete story entitled "Rescued from the Grave; or, Nick Carter's Legally Dead Client."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, August 3, 1907.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(Postage Free.)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

2 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
4 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Elephants, both in a wild state and in captivity, show a wonderful amount of sagacity. Those in India, it is said, smear themselves with mud as a protection against insects, and they will break branches from the trees and use them to brush away the flies. If this is true, it shows that the elephant possesses the power of reflection.

The training of a newly captured elephant is surprisingly simple. The animal soon learns to work. For the first three days, which is usually the time before he will eat freely, the elephant is left quiet with perhaps a tame animal near him to give him confidence in his surroundings. If there is no tame animal at the same time, each captive is stalled between the tamed ones as soon as he eats his food naturally.

When this stage of training is reached the tamer and his assistants mount themselves on each of the four sides with long goads in their hands. A tame elephant is also at hand in case he is needed. The men at the sides rub the animal's back, soothing him with such epithets as "Ho, my son," "Ho, my father," "Ho, my mother," which seem to have a calming effect.

The next step is to take the animal to the tank to bathe, which is accomplished at first with the aid of tame elephants. After a time he can be taken alone, but, as the process of taming depends largely upon the individual disposition of the beast, the time of preliminary training differs.

A newly tamed elephant is first put to the task of treading clay in a brick-field or drawing a wagon in double harness with a tamed elephant. But where it shows the greatest amount of sagacity is in moving heavy weights. For, unlike the horse, it seems to understand the object of its work, and executes various moves without the supervision of its master.

The flag under which Paul Jones fought the famous sea-battle between the *Bon Homme Richard* in her bloody encounter with the *Serapis* was not the stars and stripes, but a flag bearing a rattlesnake with thirteen rattles, and the motto: "Don't tread on me." The same flag was carried by the famous minute-men of Culpeper County, Virginia, who during the Revolution, according to the words of John Randolph, "were raised in a minute, armed in a minute, fought in a minute, and conquered in a minute."

Noble fellows were those riflemen of Culpeper, brave as steel, and men who could "hark" a squirrel at two hundred yards. Their dress was peculiar, consisting of green hunting-shirts, and the motto, "Liberty or Death," worked in white letters upon the breast, and wearing white buck-tails for plumes.

[illegible] a common emblem, and by the [illegible] proper. It is an American reptile, and never strikes until it is molested by some enemy; but when it does strike, it is death. It is said of Audubon that he desired to have the wild turkey—a noble native bird—figure upon our national banner, but the rattlesnake would be less suggestive of "thanksgiving." The eagle which presides over our flag is, however, best of all. "The fierce gray bird with the bending beak," and an eye that never flinches.

A hunter of world-wide fame has this to say in connection with the ferocity of wild hogs:

I have knocked over a lion or two, and stopped the charge of a wounded tiger; I know what the rush of a rogue elephant means, and I have been in and out of the forcible chug of a grizzly; but none of those animals showed the pluck and ferocity of a drove of wild hogs which I met in Colorado.

I was out shooting with two Indian guides named Tite and Paul. Tite told me to have my rifle ready and take my stand near a spreading tree with some low-hanging limbs. He and Paul, the second Indian, stepped off to the sides, each standing beside a sapling. Then they sent the dogs into the underbrush and awaited developments.

Presently the dogs broke out of the underbrush and made away, as if they had important business at the other end of the county. Closely behind the dogs came a big boar, foam dripping from his great tusks, and covered with the blood of a slaughtered dog. Tite fired, hitting him squarely in the head; but the boar only grunted with rage and kept on.

The guide dropped his gun and was up the sapling in a flash. The boar came on full tilt and hurled himself head foremost against the little tree. The blow nearly shook the guide off. After two or three attempts to butt down the tree, the boar began digging up the earth until it struck a root, which he bit through with his razorlike teeth.

I thought it good time to take a hand. I had scrambled up into a tree and fired at the boar, but did not bring the animal down. It took seven shots to do that. After the big boar had been disposed of, Tite and I thought of Paul. He was concealed by intervening underbrush, but we could hear his rifle popping. Then the rifle-shots suddenly stopped, and we heard only snarls and grunts. When we got where we had a clear view we saw an exciting spectacle.

All the drove except the big boar had broken through the brush near where Paul was standing. He promptly "shinned" his sapling, and there he was, surrounded by some of the most hurting the tree, others vigorously undermining it. He had made good use of his rifle, but he had started out with only half a dozen cartridges, and there were more hogs than cartridges. If he had been alone he certainly would have lost his life, for the hogs would either have brought down the tree or waited till hunger and exhaustion had forced him to loose his grip. Once out of the tree, he would have been torn to pieces in a twinkling.

Tite and I climbed two trees where we had a clear range and opened fire. We had plenty of ammunition, and, of course, there could be but one issue. But not one of the hogs—there were nineteen—ran away. All were killed while raging and foaming and fighting at the foot of one of the trees in which we were perched.

When we looked over our cartridge-belts we found that it had taken fifty bullets to dispose of the drove. Yet all three of us were accounted good shots.

A sawmill situated in a Western town was infested with rats, which, being unmolested, became very numerous and bold. But one day a weasel came upon the scene, and at once declared war on the rats.

One by one the rats became victims of the weasel's superior strength, until only a solitary large, strong fellow was left of the once numerous colony. The weasel attacked the big rat several times, but each time the rat proved victorious.

One day the weasel was seen busily digging under a timber-pile near the mill. He was engaged for some time, but later appeared again in the mill, seeking his old enemy. He soon found him, and at once renewed hostilities. As usual, after a lively tussle, the rat proved too much for him, and he ran, pursued closely by the rat, straight to the hole under the timber-pile.

He ran in, still followed by the rat, almost immediately reappeared from the end of the pile, and again dodged into the hole behind the rat. Neither was seen again for some time, but the weasel finally reappeared, looking no worse for the fight.

The workmen at the men in the mill was aroused, and they proceeded to investigate the hole under the timber. They found that the weasel had dug the hole sufficiently large at the

first end to admit the rat, but had gradually tapered it as he proceeded until at the other end it barely allowed his own slender body to pass.

When the rat chased him into the large end of this underground funnel, he quickly slipped on through, and while the rat was trying to squeeze his large body into the smaller part of the hole, the weasel dodged in behind him and killed him.

I want to thank you for the many hours of pleasure which your little weekly periodical has given me. I am an exile from home, thousands of miles beyond the Pacific Coast, and among a strange people, though, of course, it is my own fault, since I enlisted through a whim, and a desire to see something of the world. Well, say, I'm seeing it all right, and I give you my word I'd a thousand times rather be back in "little old New York," where most of Nick Carter's clever rackets are worked. He is a jim-dandy, and don't you forget it. Nearly all the boys in khaki out here read NICK CARTER WEEKLY. We enjoy the class of stories it contains. They are ingenious, and in a class like nothing else. I never read anything so good, even in the French detective line. Give the author the best regards of his soldier-boy friends in the Philippines. Well, I've written quite enough, and it's me to hike along and mail this at the post-office. NEW YORK BOB.

Manila, P. I., Quartermaster's Dept.

Glad to hear from you, and to know that our stories help you to pass away an occasional dull hour. We realize how time drags very often under such conditions, and any innocent form of recreation that makes the exile forget his troubles is to be commended, as it allows him a chance to recover his lost grip.

Nick Carter has often had occasion to depend upon Indian scouts in reaching his destination speedily and safely, traits, since he has lived among the red men of the Far West, and learned their habits. It might interest many of our readers to know something about the manner in which a clever red man follows a trail through instinct more than sight. Suppose then a single Indian has been following the right-hand bank of the Rio Pecos River, where it trends to the angle of the Chico Mountains, New Mexico.

Fort Sumner is fifty miles to the south, Santa Fé one hundred to the north. It is a wild, weird country, with the Staked Plains sweeping right up to the waters of the Pecos from the east, and the country to the west is barren, ravine, valley, and desolation.

In the dip of the earth, and still further shielded by great boulders, the Indian has found a few charred sticks and a handful of ashes—nothing more. He springs to the cover of a rock, and for a quarter of an hour nothing is seen or heard of him. Instinct taught him that one master mistake was worth several lives. By and by he carefully rises into view and steps forward to examine the ashes.

It remains there but a moment. The ashes are dry. The black circle proves their age. A twig broken from a bush is still bleeding. A knee in the ashes is broken to get at the marrow. Time is Wednesday, and the hour is ten o'clock in the forenoon. Those fires were built Monday noon. The prints of a boot-heel are unmistakable. It was a white man. The prints are exactly alike. There was but one man—a man, hunter, or prospector. He was heading up the arroyo.

Everything is clear to the Indian in five minutes, and he picks up the trail.

There is no stooping, while the keenest dog could follow. The Indian glides forward like a shadow, looking only at the lay of the ground. A man who travels without fear takes the easiest road. A man who is not pursued travels slowly. To the rocks—to the left—over rocks—across hills—up hill—down hill—never lagging, no matter what the obstructions, and at the end of three hours he turns sharply to the left, penetrates the cedars for a few yards, and comes to a halt before another campfire.

Half an hour for rest, and a long run out, and the Indian moves on. Those dead leaves he has been placing his moccasins in have caught the dew here, and the trail is fresh. Those ashes are cold. Those dead leaves that have been pressed down by the weight of a body have not yet regained their erect position. The pursuer has only to follow the pursued. Another camp-fire, and could I read the signs in those leaves he has reached another camp-fire. It was built some time before midnight, and the pursued, under some instinct or fear, has pushed on. It was not thirty minutes ago that the Indian was here. He was not thirty minutes behind the pursued.

I want to thank you for the many hours of pleasure which your little weekly periodical has given me. I am an exile from home, thousands of miles beyond the Pacific Coast, and among a strange people, though, of course, it is my own fault, since I enlisted through a whim, and a desire to see something of the world. Well, say, I'm seeing it all right, and I give you my word I'd a thousand times rather be back in "little old New York," where most of Nick Carter's clever rackets are worked. He is a jim-dandy, and don't you forget it. Nearly all the boys in khaki out here read NICK CARTER WEEKLY. We enjoy the class of stories it contains. They are ingenious, and in a class like nothing else. I never read anything so good, even in the French detective line. Give the author the best regards of his soldier-boy friends in the Philippines. Well, I've written quite enough, and it's me to hike along and mail this at the post-office. NEW YORK BOB.

Manila, P. I., Quartermaster's Dept.

Glad to hear from you, and to know that our stories help you to pass away an occasional dull hour. We realize how time drags very often under such conditions, and any innocent form of recreation that makes the exile forget his troubles is to be commended, as it allows him a chance to recover his lost grip.

Nick Carter has often had occasion to depend upon Indian scouts in reaching his destination speedily and safely, traits, since he has lived among the red men of the Far West, and learned their habits. It might interest many of our readers to know something about the manner in which a clever red man follows a trail through instinct more than sight. Suppose then a single Indian has been following the right-hand bank of the Rio Pecos River, where it trends to the angle of the Chico Mountains, New Mexico.

Fort Sumner is fifty miles to the south, Santa Fé one hundred to the north. It is a wild, weird country, with the Staked Plains sweeping right up to the waters of the Pecos from the east, and the country to the west is barren, ravine, valley, and desolation.

In the dip of the earth, and still further shielded by great boulders, the Indian has found a few charred sticks and a handful of ashes—nothing more. He springs to the cover of a rock, and for a quarter of an hour nothing is seen or heard of him. Instinct taught him that one master mistake was worth several lives. By and by he carefully rises into view and steps forward to examine the ashes.

It remains there but a moment. The ashes are dry. The black circle proves their age. A twig broken from a bush is still bleeding. A knee in the ashes is broken to get at the marrow. Time is Wednesday, and the hour is ten o'clock in the forenoon. Those fires were built Monday noon. The prints of a boot-heel are unmistakable. It was a white man. The prints are exactly alike. There was but one man—a man, hunter, or prospector. He was heading up the arroyo.

Everything is clear to the Indian in five minutes, and he picks up the trail.

There is no stooping, while the keenest dog could follow. The Indian glides forward like a shadow, looking only at the lay of the ground. A man who travels without fear takes the easiest road. A man who is not pursued travels slowly. To the rocks—to the left—over rocks—across hills—up hill—down hill—never lagging, no matter what the obstructions, and at the end of three hours he turns sharply to the left, penetrates the cedars for a few yards, and comes to a halt before another camp-fire.

Half an hour for rest, and a long run out, and the Indian moves on. Those dead leaves he has been placing his moccasins in have caught the dew here, and the trail is fresh. Those ashes are cold. Those dead leaves that have been pressed down by the weight of a body have not yet regained their erect position. The pursuer has only to follow the pursued. Another camp-fire, and could I read the signs in those leaves he has reached another camp-fire. It was built some time before midnight, and the pursued, under some instinct or fear, has pushed on. It was not thirty minutes ago that the Indian was here. He was not thirty minutes behind the pursued.

---

however. Fire clings to several sticks, and the earth under the ashes is warm.

It is twilight in the forest—night in the cañons and gorges. The Indian has no trail to follow, but there is an instinct which leads him on. He knows he is close on the quarry. He moves slowly and stealthily. There are rocks, and bushes, and limbs, and vines, and pitfalls, but he seems to see them in the darkness as well as in the light. The flame of a camp-fire has caught his eye.

A man clothed in the coarse garments of a miner sits with his back to a rock. On the fire at his feet his meat is toasting and his coffee is boiling. The silence about him is that of the grave. The man looks into the fire. For a moment his thoughts are elsewhere. Of a sudden, that mysterious something—that current which passes between life and death, electrifies him, and with his gaze riveted into the darkness beyond the fire he springs to his feet.

Too late! The Indian is not thirty feet away, but before he can lay a hand on the body life has departed. When a bullet strikes the human heart, life is measured by seconds and fractions of seconds.

Last night there was a dead body lying in the gorge. It had been stripped of clothing, and the scalp-lock was gone, but a friend could have identified the features. To-night there is no body—only a few horrible stains on the rocks, and a wolf licks at these and growls his anger that he came too late.

The most curious weapons of war now in use are to be found in Australia, Patagonia, and India, where the boomerang, bola, and shakra are used by the native races. The Australian boomerang is a most formidable weapon, much more so than it looks. It is made of hard wood in a curve, and is from two feet to two feet nine inches long, by from two to three inches broad. It has one side convex, the other flat, with a sharp edge along the convexity of the curve. The curve varies greatly in different instruments. The thrower can hurl it with great force in any required direction, even making it return and fall behind him. A writer recorded having seen a dog killed on the spot, and nearly cut in two by a stroke from the weapon, and in another case a brass spur was cut off the heel of a horseman by a boomerang in its flight.

The Patagonian bola consists of two and sometimes three balls at the end of hide thongs. The balls are made of stone, and sometimes of iron and copper, and are about the same size as baseballs. Each thong is from six to eight feet in length, and is made of two pieces of rawhide, which are dampened and then twisted together. The thrower whirls the weapon over his head till it has gathered enough centrifugal force to separate the balls, and then it is launched against the object aimed at.

The chakra, or war quoit, used by the Sikhs in India, is a missile thrown in a manner somewhat similar to the Australian boomerang, but is hooplike in shape, less than a foot in diameter, is made of thin steel, and is sharpened to a razor edge on the outside. The mode of casting it is to spin it on the forefinger, and then to hurl it. It is generally aimed at the face of the adversary, and a skilful warrior will hurl four or five in such rapid succession that it is scarcely possible to avoid being touched by one of them, and having the face laid open, or the nose or lip shockingly cut off, and sometimes if it misses the face, it is said that it will even cut off a limb.

SOLVING A MYSTERY.

BY EMERSON BENNETT.

There had been a series of mysterious robberies for which no one could account. A dozen dwellings within a radius of a mile had been entered and silver plate, money, jewelry, and clothing had been carried off, and yet nobody could say how, nor, of course, by whom.

There was not the ordinary trace of a forced shutter, or an unlocked door, to indicate how the thief had made his entrance and exit. It was as if some one inside had admitted him, and locked the door after his egress.

This would have been a very natural supposition had the fact only occurred at one house, or even at two or three. But the great mystery was, that every one had

been robbed in exactly the same manner; and it was not in reason to suppose that every servant was a thief, or colleagued with a thief. Besides, as if to utterly refute this theory, two dwellings at least had been robbed in this manner when it was known that no servant was in the house, and that the whole family, except the master himself, was away from home.

All these burglaries took place, too, within a few weeks. People became alarmed for the safety of their household goods, and the police were blamed for permitting the thief or thieves to escape. In fact, there were not wanting those who declared that the police themselves were the robbers. This naturally annoyed and worried the faithful guardians, who, having long beats to traverse through the dark and lonely hours, could not, of course, render themselves ubiquitous, and be in every place at the same time.

It was at this juncture that a gentleman called at my office and asked to see the chief detective.

"At your service, sir," I smiled.

"Ah! you are James Carbon, then?"

I bowed affirmatively.

"I expected to see a much older man," he observed.

He then went on to state facts similar to those I have given, concluding with an offer of a thousand dollars to have the mystery solved.

"A few of my neighbors and myself have canvassed this matter," he said, "and have come to the conclusion that it must be thoroughly investigated by a competent person, and I have been directed to come to you."

I bowed to the compliment.

"Will you undertake the investigation?"

"Not on a contingency, nor with any promise of success," I promptly answered. "I will undertake to do my best toward solving the mystery, provided my time be paid for without regard to the result."

Having finally arranged matters to our mutual satisfaction, I went home with the gentleman, and made a thorough examination of his residence, one of the number which had been robbed.

It was a handsome four-story dwelling, and there were no marks on shutters or doors to show that any force had been used in opening them.

I visited and examined all the rooms, upper as well as lower. On the sill of one of the third-story windows I found about a dozen dark-brown hairs, which looked rather like those of an animal than of a human being.

They might be of no consequence; but I have a rule in my profession to pass over nothing, no matter how insignificant. So I carefully gathered them, wrapped them in white paper, and kept them for further examination. How had they come there? Perhaps from a cat or a dog sitting on the window-sill.

"Have you a dog?" I asked the owner of the mansion.

"I have not."

"A cat, then?"

"Yes, two."

"Please let me see them."

When the animals were brought to me I examined both carefully. The colors were similar, but the hairs evidently did not come from either.

"Do you keep any other animals about your dwelling?"

"None, sir."

"Have you rats in the house?"

"I have seen none of late," was the reply. "Some time ago there were some in the cellar."

The hairs might possibly belong to rats. I could not tell then. I should have to examine them with a microscope.

"Well, what then?" I fancy I hear some one ask.

"Well, nothing then, if they were hairs of the rats."

I looked down from the window. There was a sheer descent of from thirty to forty feet, with no shed, balcony, water-spout, or other protuberance that any person could lay hold of to climb up there, even if that had been the place of entrance, of which there was no evidence whatever.

And yet, strangely enough, I had somehow imbibed the idea that the dwelling had been entered through that window. In the course of my years of experience I have often been led to believe that intuition has had quite as much to do with success as reasoning.

Having finished with the first dwelling, I went to another, which had been robbed in like manner, and thoroughly inspected that.

In the second I found nothing at all to give me the slightest clue to the burglars. So with the third and fourth.

In the fifth, in the bottom of a closet, whence some wearing-apparel had been taken, I found a few more hairs, which seemed to match those I had already preserved. This was a coincidence which might amount to nothing.

"Have you any idea from what living thing came this hair?" I asked the owner of the premises.

"I have not," he answered, after examination.

"You have no dog nor cat with hair like it?"

"I have neither in the house."

I went home perplexed, and examined the two sets of hair by a microscope. So far as I could judge they were all from the same animal. But what did that prove? They might have come from the same kind of an animal, and that animal be a rat.

Well, I took the trouble to send and procure a rat of the same color, or as near it as possible, and I compared the hairs under a microscope. They were not the same. There was as much difference as between the hairs of any other two animals.

Now, what had I gained by all this? Simply the fact that the hairs on the window-sill, and the hairs in the closet, of the two different houses that had been robbed, were not the hairs of any animal known to belong to either house, while the microscope clearly showed that they were not from any dog, cat, or rat.

Why did I dwell so much on these hairs? Well, because they were the only chances for a clue to the robberies which I had so far obtained.

But were they so at all? Hardly, except as being a part of the mystery—except that they had got into the same dwellings from which the things had gone out, and possibly had some connection with each other.

"Rather a far-fetched conclusion," I think I hear you say.

During the first week I visited and examined carefully every dwelling that had been robbed, and I found two more specimens of the hairs I have mentioned.

Now, these hairs, when examined under the microscope, all looked exactly alike, and one could almost swear that they had come from the same animal.

Well, if so, what then? Why, much, then. It went to prove that an animal of some kind had accompanied the burglar, or had itself committed the robberies.

Now, what animal could commit these robberies? One of the monkey kind, perhaps. Ha! yes! well!

This started a theory, on which I went to work. If an animal had removed these goods, it was probable that nothing had been forced inside or out; that no chests, drawers, trunks, or closets had been broken into, but such things taken as were not under lock and key, and especially if the key had been removed from the lock.

I lost no time in questioning the different parties, and found that I had so far made a correct surmise.

A few at first thought they could show that something had been broken into, but when pressed down to the real fact, they were compelled to admit that there was no evidence of actual force, and that locked drawers and closets, in different apartments, had not been opened at all.

At this I felt encouraged. I had now something to build upon. The houses had been robbed, not by a man, but by a monkey.

I procured some monkey's hair, and compared it with what I had collected.

Yes, though of different color, it was so like in structure to what I had discovered during my investigation, that I knew it was hair from the same kind of a beast.

This theory would account for the fact of nothing having been forced, neither door nor window. Some contrivance had probably been arranged for the monkey to climb to the upper story, where the windows would be open of a warm night, and perhaps none of them guarded by barred shutters.

Well, so far so good. Suppose a monkey had done the burglarious part of the business, that cunning and imitative little brute had not worked alone! He had been trained, and had a master. If he had gone in alone, and thrown out the goods alone, he had not carried them off alone. The point, therefore, was now to find man and beast. And not only to find them, but to prove the facts against them. This would require a different mode of proceeding altogether, and I prepared for that.

There were many Italian organ-grinders in the city, some of whom had monkeys, and my suspicion fixed upon this class of lazy, thieving vagabonds; and as they mostly clanned, or lived together in a wretched community, I believed my best plan would be to disguise myself and go among them, keeping my eyes and ears open.

I got old, soiled clothes, begrimed my hands and face, disheveled my hair, took on the look and swagger of a saucy tramp, and boldly plunged into their filthy quarters, assuming the manner of one more used to that kind of life than any other.

"See yere," I said, in a rough, boasting way. "I ain't no beggar, and I don't want to steal nothing, and I ain't a-hiding from no perlice, and I ain't afraid of no officer, 'cause I'm a honest man. I ain't got no money about me, it's true, but I'm commissioned, for all that. I'm commissioned to buy a monkey, ef I kin find one that's up to tricks, and I'll soon fetch a man that'll pay a big price for him."

This general introduction soon made me an object of interest to all of those who owned monkeys, and they flocked around me, chattering as fast, and to me, as unintelligibly, as the little brutes themselves.

Of course, I at once began to inspect the different animals, and to inquire into their different merits, their different degrees of intelligence, what tricks they could perform, and so forth and so on.

To my deep regret, not to say chagrin, I found none that answered my expectations. Their tricks, what few they had, were of the common order—making bows, doffing their caps, holding out their hands, grimacing, chattering, putting away money, and the like.

"They won't none o' 'em suit my boss," I growled. "He wants so'thing cuter'n them."

"Vat he want, den?" inquired one rather angrily.

"Oh, so'thing that's got tricks that ain't as old as creation! Say, now, has any of you got a critter that you kin make climb a long, straight pole, 'way up in the air, and then open a winder, ef he's wanted to?"

"Aha! I knows him!" said a swarthy, broad, flat-faced fellow, laying one finger alongside of his nose in a knowing manner. "You come along me."

He took me back, up a small, narrow alley, into a wretched hovel, where a man and a large monkey lay asleep on the floor, though it was not far from noon.

My guide spoke in Italian to the man on the floor, who, together with the monkey, roused up and looked at me with a kind of savage suspicion.

The monkey had a more intelligent look than his master, who was one of the villainous sort. He snarled out something in reply to the other Italian, and then turned over, with his back toward me.

"Him no sell," said my guide, and he led me away out of the wretched place.

I growled and swaggered off, saying I would have to look somewhere else for what I wanted.

I believed, however, I had found my man, and I soon had a close watch set around that locality, that he might not slip away unseen and unfollowed.

The first two days and nights resulted in nothing, and I began to get discouraged.

The third night, however, he appeared, walking with a large cudgel. He was followed several blocks, or squares, and was seen to enter a covered vehicle, resembling a market-wagon.

This drove off, and, of course, was followed. It found its way to a quiet, aristocratic part of the city. Then the man got out with his thick cudgel, and a big stuffed wallet. He went in one direction and the team in another, and each was followed by different parties.

The man soon found his way to the rear of a large, fine mansion. Then his wallet was opened, and a monkey appeared, and the cudgel was elongated, like a fishing-rod, by uniting one part with another, till it stretched up to a third-story window, which was open. Then the monkey, at a signal, went cautiously up the pole and disappeared through the window.

In a few minutes a quantity of clothing was thrown out, which the man caught and crammed into a large bag. This was repeated, at short intervals, several times. Then, after a longer disappearance, the monkey came out with a small bundle, which he had made up himself, and which really contained money and jewelry, and one gold watch. He then came down the pole, which the owner again shut up into the cudgel, and the bag was thrown over into an alley.

At this point the market-wagon hove in sight, and the human thief was preparing to join it, when, at a signal of mine, all the parties were arrested.

The Italian subsequently got ten years in the penitentiary on different counts, and I obtained a good deal of credit for solving a curious thieving mystery.

THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS

No other detective stories are half as interesting as those that appear in this publication. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest numbers from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

526—A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play.
527—Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motor-boat Chase.
528—Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant.
529—The Index of Seven Stars; or, Nick Carter Finds the Hidden City.
530—An Amazonian Queen; or, Nick Carter Becomes a Gladiator.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise; or, Nick Carter Discovers the Hidden Hand.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer; or, Nick Carter's First-class Bluff.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.
535—The Making of a King; or, Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.
536—The Empire of a Goddess; or, Nick Carter's Wonderful Adventure.
537—Zanabayah, the Terrible; or, Nick Carter's Struggle With the Vitic King.
538—The Seven-headed Monster; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Caller.
539—The Woman of the Mask; or, Nick Carter's Quadruple Mystery.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot; or, Nick Carter Springs a Surprise.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King; or, Nick Carter Downs the Yeggman.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang; or, Nick Carter and the Yeggman Queen.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights; or, Nick Carter and the Temple of Vice.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain Storm.
546—Three Against Fifteen; or, Patsy's Splendid Courage.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast; or, Nick Carter's Very Slender Clue.
549—The House of Secrets; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Vigil.
550—The Lost Bank President; or, Nick Carter Takes a Great Big Chance.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot; or, Nick Carter's Three Assistants at Work.
552—The Dare-devil Crook; or, Nick Carter Finds a Promising Clue.
553—A Mystery From the Klondyke; or, Nick Carter's Double-headed Case.
554—Returned From the Grave; or, Nick Carter's Legally Dead Client.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch; or, Nick Carter Against the "Brown Chet" Outfit.

If you want any back numbers of this publication and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.